MURDER ABOARD A STRICKEN SHIP

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CHAPTER I

THE EMPTY SHIP

THE cadence of the footfalls on the deck behind him broke the cadence of his breathing; and Gabriel Adams, though retaining the prone comfort of his position on the baked forepeak of the S. S. *Apeldoorn,* opened his eyes sleepily and braved the glare of the sun upon the face of his wrist watch, six inches from the end of his nose.

The watch said eleven o'clock, which explained the footfalls and brought forth a lazy groan from him. The April sun was comfortably hot, for the ship was within thirteen degrees of the Equator. It could have been thick heat, but the prevailing trades, sweeping in across the port quarter from the northeast, cut it immeasurably. There was a premium on raw sunlight.

As far south as Trujillo City in Dominica, the voyage had been singularly unblessed regarding weather, with cloudiness and rain most of the way, and even, further northward off New Jersey, flurries of snow.

Eleven o'clock meant bouillon and Hans van der Decken, the ship's steward. Gabriel rose to his elbows and tried to find van der Decken, but the latter was sunward where the glare was blinding.

"Hans!" he called, "I'll cut your heart out some day. Just once you'll wake me up and offer bouillon when I've got my *pukkah* by my side. Can't you realize the comfort of a passenger, even on a freight tub like this one, makes him an Untouchable? I don't want any of your damn bouillon and you know I don't want it!"

Van der Decken hardly heard him, for he was still some twenty feet away, with the wind between them. Gabriel sat up, shielding his eyes from the day's brightness. The sky was daubed with puffy clouds which sailed on the wind.

He hitched up his swimming trunks and pulled his terrycloth robe under him, leaning back against the iron supports of a completely unsatisfactory canvas swimming pool, the cubic footage of which would have given claustrophobia to a gnat.

He peered dead ahead off the point of the *Apeldoorn's* bow, pleased with the neat ribbed pattern of the Caribbean. There was a faint manifestation of darkness on the perimeter of the waters, like a ragged wisp of soot. It could have been the smoke of a ship, but it was so extensive as to herald a landfall.

Van der Decken let his shadow fall across Gabriel's face, with rare courtesy, so that Gabriel wouldn't have to blind himself in conversation.

"Als 't u belieft, mijnheer," said the steward, nodding. "Bouillon?"

"Didn't you hear me?" Gabriel said. "I'll say this for the Dutch, Hans, they are very stubborn fellows. How many times have I taken passage on this ship—seven—eight times? And how many times have I told you I can't stand bouillon and that I don't want any? Never mind, it's beyond belief. May a Greater Power than I wake you from as comfortable a snooze some day. . . . You don't have your tray anyhow; are you kidding me?"

In all this havoc that surrounded them, they could only cling together and hope for safety

Van der Decken grinned. *"Ja mijnheer,"* he said. "But you had to be awakened anyhow. This sun is strong, and your back is too white. You'd get a bad sunburn. Besides, the radio officer would like to see you on the bridge deck at your earliest convenience."

Gabriel winced. "Deechen's probably not talking to me by now. I haven't even seen him since we left New York, and we should have all got together for a rummy game before this. What does he want?"

"It's not Mr. Deechen," said Van der Decken, scowling. "We have a new radio officer this voyage. Deechen didn't sail. I thought you knew that."

"No! I wondered why I didn't run into Deechen around and about. I thought it was odd I didn't see him at dinner at all. What happened to him?"

The steward shrugged. "I don't know. He didn't sail, that's all."

GABRIEL looked regretful. "The *Apeldoorn's* personnel seems to be half shot this trip. It was bad enough when Mr. Drakensberg failed to sail. That man, outside of being a shark when it came to getting four of a kind and his hand down first, was really one of the smartest chief officers I've ever met, and his replacement, this Fritz Steuber, is about as friendly as a rattlesnake with rabies. . . . Do you suppose Drakensberg and Deechen were transferred to another Royal Dutch Line ship?"

"Maybe Deechen was," said Van der Decken. "But I heard that Drakensberg was sick and couldn't sail. Captain Klinkert could tell you."

"I think I'll ask him, at that. There go the old rummy sessions. Now all that has to happen is for you and Captain

Klinkert to leave the ship, and there won't be any reason left to travel on her."

"That's nice of you, *mijnheer.*"

"No, it isn't," Gabriel said, frowning. "I'm serious, Hans. The first time I traveled on the *Apeldoorn* was because I couldn't get another boat for the port I wanted. I forget where I was going now—Belize, wasn't it? And the captain, and you, and Deechen, and Drakensberg—and even the little mouse Cumstock, all made it such a pleasant trip, you sold me completely. Well, look, that was four years ago, and I've never sailed south on another deck since then."

Van der Decken nodded. "Eight trips, *mijnheer.* That is pretty good. You'd better put your robe on, with this sun. You don't want to get too much. To tell you the truth, I was half thinking—"

Gabriel interrupted him, peering ahead. "I guessed that was a landfall and I think I'm right. Isn't it Curacao, Hans?"

"Ja," Van der Decken said.

"You didn't even look."

"Neen, I didn't even look." Van der Decken sighed listlessly. "I don't have to look, *mijnheer.* We are due in Wilhelmstad at one o'clock and at one o'clock we will be there. That is the monotony of working on a first-class freight ship. You might as well have a timetable and a train.

"Nothing is ever new at sea. Landfalls are the same, departures are the same, even the gales behave alike. Maybe Deechen is tired of it like me. It's enough to make a man melancholy." He coughed to express melancholia. "I was half thinking of leaving the ship myself."

Gabriel rose to his feet and wrapped his robe around himself, the wind beating it between his legs. He studied the steward, repressing a smile. The bloom of health upon the pink-skinned face of van der Decken made any presence of melancholia an anachronism.

Van der Decken was younger than himself, as big, with flaxen hair, blue eyes and an incredibly rugged face, his cheekbones, nose and chin all minor promontories, along with a marked protrusion above the eyes. There was something medieval about his face, but it was hardly sensitive.

"It isn't the sea," Gabriel said. "Most jobs get monotonous after awhile, and the other fellow's grass always looks greener. I wouldn't be hasty leaving all this." He indicated the vastness. "It has certain elemental values which you would miss."

"I know," van der Decken said, his chin thrust forward. "But I didn't come to sea for a job, I came for adventure. I ran away from home when I was nineteen and shipped to see all of the cities and lands I had read about in school. Adventure, *foei!* There would have been more adventure if I had stayed with my father and become a *bloemist* and raised tulips!"

Gabriel laughed. "You sound thoroughly jaded."

"Jaded?" The steward puzzled. "That is a new word for me. Does it mean bored? Because I am so bored that I have thought of going home and buying a little farm near Groningen—that's the home town—and marrying a she who wasn't a ship. *Ja,* Mijnheer Adams, a wife to warm my bed at night and give me children. There is no time for boredom with children. I know I was the sixth myself, and even then, not the last."

GABRIEL smiled, "Your lady *Apeldoorn* may not warm you at night, but you can always invest in a pair of woolen socks. And think of her stability, her quietude, the simplicity of life aboard her. A lot of folk would trade with you in a moment. I know, I know—it's spring and you're young. I prescribe a dose of sulphur and molasses before you do something horrible."

"Oh well," Van der Decken said drily, "that's all right for you. But I'm different."

"I resent that."

The steward chuckled. "*Ja,* but women do not interest you. I've seen them follow you around like dogs waiting for a scrap from the table; you wouldn't even throw them a bone."

"Hmm," Gabriel admitted, "you're right, of course. I'm prejudiced. It's not just a whim. Women are trouble. I always have thought so; and then I had it too graphically confirmed when a friend of mine lost his life because of a woman who lost her head. Yes, Hans, women are trouble and adventure is an illusion."

"You're one to be cynical, *mijnheer. Heusch!* It's easy to say it is illusion after you have adventures to find that out, *natuurlijk.* But, just the same, it must be exciting to head a museum and take so many trips to capture things."

Gabriel looked pained. "Head of a museum? Where did you get that idea? Come on and walk me to my cabin, Hans. I can see you need an object lesson. If you think I'm a glamor boy, you're the only one who does.

"In New York, at the Federal Museum, I'm a relatively unimportant guy they call a research associate and assistant curator. In what department? It will kill you, my boy. In the Department of Living and Extinct Fishes."

They paused to step over the high sill and then descend the staircase amidships. Gabriel resumed, "I forgot to mention that I am also credited with being a research associate in paleontology, and, of course, there is my Ph.D. Is this too exciting for you, Hans?"

"You're exaggerating," Van der Decken replied, his brow furrowed. "A young man like you being all those things?"

"Good Lord, you aren't awed by them? The lesson is lost. Yes, Hans, they're mine, all mine; and I couldn't give them away. They make me a very flinty fellow."

"Until some one meets you, *mijnheer.*"

"That is outright flattery," Gabriel grinned, "and beside the point. I spend most of my time delving in informed piscatorial journals trying to garner information on some high odored *visch* who might have been the Adam of the flounder family. Or, I'm off to a lovely desert, temperature 102°, to look for fossils. There's a perilous pastime! But the deadliest work is arranging and building exhibits in the museum!"

At the cabin, on C deck, Gabriel invited the steward in. "Have a seat while I dress. I can see the gleam of doubt in your eye. Oh go on, sit down, forget you're the steward. The door's closed."

Van der Decken refused to sit down. He lounged at the doorway between the sitting-room and bedroom. The suite was the largest the *Apeldoorn* boasted. "You must have had adventures sometimes, *mijnheer.* I think you're pulling my leg."

"I went on an expedition to visit the Jivaros once, the headhunters of Ecuador. We were supposed to find out all about *curari* in the raw."

"*Ja?*" Van der Decken said, his eyes gleaming. "It was not exciting there?"

Gabriel poked his head out of the bathroom. "It was a very gay affair. The packs weighed a ton. It was hot. It was very dirty. A fer-de-lance left a fang in my right boot at one spot. The ticks ticked. Every insect south of Panama got his measure of blood out of me. There was a very charming young woman in the party. She shot my best friend dead when he tripped and fell outside her tent in the dead of night. He was on guard. She thought it was a Jivaro with her virtue as his goal. We never did find the Jivaros. It was quite an adventure, Hans. Have you had enough?"

"You make it sound unpleasant, *mijnheer. Wel,* then what of this trip? What are you off to this time?"

"RIPROARING, high-binding stuff this time." Gabriel came out of the bedroom in a white linen suit. "How do I look? All right? Tailor did a good job on this left pocket. I stuck a hot pipe in there and forgot it, and the ashes burned through. You'd never know it now. . . .

"Yes, this will be the epitome of boredom, Hans. I'm bound for an Ishi congress in Rio de Janeiro. I ought to take you along and teach you a sound lesson in *ennui.*"

Van der Decken looked completely blank. "Ishi? I never heard it. *Ik versta het niet.*"

"An Ishi is a member in good standing of the International Society of Herpetolo-

gists and Ichthyologists," Gabriel said. "Don't ask me to explain what that means. Take it for granted. The annual congress is May 15th and I'm lazing my way down to represent the Federal Museum."

He smiled as the steward's face fell. "Beginning to get the idea? Good. Stick with the *Apeldoorn*, Hans, she's your real option on action. One day they'll send her back to Rotterdam, and you'll have a lot of fun dodging the German submarines and the British mines. That, I suppose, is real adventure, and you'll get your bellyful of it quick enough. I'm off to see the radio officer. I wonder what the devil he wants?"

Van der Decken shrugged. "See you at lunch, *mijnheer.*"

Gabriel nodded and detained the steward. "That's another thing I wanted to talk to you about. Where are all the passengers on this ship? I only saw that Cuban, Daracha, who got off in Santiago. Isn't there anyone else aboard?"

"As a matter of fact, there isn't," said van der Decken soberly. "We had a full passenger list in New York, but no one else arrived to sail."

"That's odd. They all cancelled?"

"No one cancelled. They all paid for their cabins in advance to reserve them. So we sailed with empty cabins. After all, they had been bought and reserved. We can't sell them again. There were some radiograms from people who will join the ship in Trinidad."

"You mean they're flying to Port of Spain to meet this tub?"

"Ja, mijnheer."

"That doesn't make sense. The ship only goes to Rio, then back again. Why the devil would you fly most of the way to catch a slow freighter?"

"Maybe they were afraid of the Caribbean as a war area," said Van der Decken. *"Neem mij niet kwalijk,* but I must go to the commissary now."

Gabriel left him and went upstairs to the bridge deck where the radio shack was located, starboard side, just abaft the deckhouse.

He was not at all satisfied with Van der Decken's explanation for the absence of the list. The reality of war had, truly, been brought into the Western Hemisphere. There was the charred hulk of the Graf Spee off Montevideo to testify to that.

And, with the rumors of Nazi submarines operating in the Caribbean, it was only natural that some of the intended passengers might have lost their nerve. But not all of them! Indeed, it would have been more in the American vein to take passage for the Indies and the South Atlantic in hopes of stumbling across a sea action.

There were fair possibilities, after all, with the *Luetzow* and *Scheer* at large.

CHAPTER II

ONE FISH, AGE 50,000,000

HE KNOCKED on the door of the radio shack where the legend *Verboden toegang* was inscribed, and entered without waiting. The radio officer rose from the face of his equipment which lined the walls, black and shiny, studded with dials. "Yes, sir?" he said sharply. "Are you Mr. Adams?"

"Yes. The steward told me you wanted to see me."

"That's right. I hope you don't think it was presumptuous of me, Mr. Adams, but on a ship of this size, we're necessarily short-handed, and I did not want to send the message down with him because I wasn't certain that it made sense. There are eccentricities of operation which sometimes cause mistakes, particularly with unfamiliar words."

Gabriel was surprised at the man's excellent use of English, with no trace of accent whatsoever. "That's all right, I don't mind coming up. I don't think I know you. What happened to Deechen? Transferred?"

"My name is Thimm," said the radio officer smoothly. "Rudolph Thimm. I'm sure I haven't the slightest idea what happened to Mr. Deechen. I never heard of him, of course, until I replaced him. These

transfers are all handled by the Line. You didn't know he was not aboard until now?"

His brows lifted.

"Until a few minutes ago," Gabriel said. "It's not important. He happened to be a friend of mine."

He stared at Thimm, remotely ashamed of his instantaneous decision to dislike the man, for he felt that the dislike was purely a reaction to his fondness for Deechen and the act of replacement.

But there were other considerations. Thimm had roving eyes which passed his own fleetingly and found strong points of interest in the blank wall behind Gabriel's back. He did not address himself directly, but at the crest of Gabriel's shoulder.

He was a small round-shouldered man, thin-faced, his mouth sharp and his chin receding. His tight smile was artificial, and thus rather unpleasant. He combed his thinning hair somewhat ridiculously to camouflage a bald spot on the top of his head.

He plucked a radiogram from the desk and thrust it at Gabriel furtively.

"I received this from New York through Mackay Radio at ten-forty-seven, Mr. Adams. Some of it made sense and some didn't. I wanted to corroborate with New York, but I thought you should see it first. I don't wish to seem unduly curious, but perhaps it is in code—"

Gabriel took the message. "If it's in code, that'll make two of us who can't understand it. There's no one who would wireless me in code. I don't have any code."

He read through it hastily and looked blank. He scowled and reread it with more care.

Its full meaning struck him, and he colored, his face seeming to swell as he dilated his eyes, swallowed hard and then gasped.

"No wonder you didn't get it!" he said. "I can't believe it myself! Why, it's the most marvelous thing I ever heard of! . . . If it's true. It can't be true! It's amazing. Wait a minute. Let me sit down and look at this thing!"

HE FELL into a chair and scanned the radiogram again. Thimm said, puzzling at him, "I never saw those words *ganoid* and *isopholis* before. I thought there might have been a mistake—"

"It's a fish," Gabriel exclaimed. "It's all about a fish, but I can't believe it! It couldn't happen to me, it's too damn unique! Dr. Kaufman got technical here, that's what threw you off. Why, this is the biggest thing that ever happened to the Federal Museum, if it's true, and it just might be. I'll find out soon enough. It just might be!"

"Is a fish so important?" Thimm asked, a hint of suspicion in the query.

"This one is," Gabriel said, flushed and excited. "This one happens to be fifty million years old—"

"Oh!" Thimm said. "Oh, I understand. An extinct fish."

Gabriel resented the man's complacency. "Extinct my eye! I don't think you do understand. If it's true, this fish has been extinct for fifty million years and *yet was netted last week,* off Cayo Grande! You couldn't possibly understand what that means—"

Thimm nodded, quickly disinterested and said, "A reply was requested. If you'd care to give me an answer, I'll transmit it at once."

"I've got to see the captain," Gabriel said. "I'll send an answer when I come back."

"You'll be leaving the ship then at Wilhelmstad?"

Gabriel came back to earth, shocked by the bold eagerness of Thimm's voice. At once, he regretted the quick enthusiasm which had let him talk so familiarly with the radio officer. He folded the radiogram deliberately and put it into his pocket. "Possibly," he said with reluctance. "I don't know." He thought he detected a faint expression of disappointment in Thimm's watery eyes, but he was not sure.

It was small satisfaction.

Sedate and dignified in his departure from the radio shack, Gabriel dropped the pretense on the boat deck and raced for-

ward toward the bridge. He climbed up and entered it noisily, slamming the port door and startling the helmsman.

"You should not be up here, *mijnheer,*" the watch officer Cumstock said. "The bridge is forbidden passengers." He was sharp and severe.

"I know," said Gabriel. "But I've got to see the captain."

"He is in his cabin," Cumstock said, still reprovingly.

"Thanks," Gabriel said. "*Dank u.*"

He caught a quick glimpse of the land ahead, Curacao, sitting in the sun, dead on the bow, but still an hour away.

The visibility was unlimited, no haze at all, and the rocky hills of the island, almost bare of trees, looked sandy and colorless.

He left the bridge and retreated along the deck of the master's cabin where, after a deep breath, he knocked and went in.

CAPTAIN PETER KLINKERT'S eyes were laughing and he said in his booming voice, "So, Gabriel, you are trying to upset my ship, *neen?* Mr. Cumstock telephoned from the bridge this moment. Scaring my quartermaster two degrees off his course, *wel!*"

"You're pulling my leg, Captain," Gabriel said. "I guess I did burst in, but I had to see you. I've got to leave the ship at Wilhelmstad and get to La Guayra as quickly as possible. I didn't know about connections—"

"Leaving the ship?" Captain Klinkert replied, displeased. "That's bad news. What's happened to you?"

"Biggest thing yet. Very important. Of course, it'll sound very silly to you, but—here, read the radiogram yourself and then I'll explain it to you."

Captain Klinkert told him to sit down and sit still, and accepted the radiogram. He read it aloud, slowly, glowering as he did so.

GANOID ISOPHOLIS BRITISH TRIASSIC CAPTURED CAYO GRANDE STOP CONTACT BRAGGE LA GUAYRA SECRECY ESSENTIAL PAY TO TEN THOUSAND STOP CONFIRM KAUFMAN.

Captain Klinkert handed the message back to him and made a grim face. "We Dutch are fine linguists, Gabriel. But we are not seers, *ei?* Something British has been captured and you want to buy it in La Guayra." He shrugged. "Am I wrong?"

"Horribly," said Gabriel, grinning. "The truth is, Captain, that a man named Bragge who happens to be a contributing member of the Federal Museum, stumbled on something big. Somehow he's laid hands on a fish, caught in the south Caribbean, which is supposed to have been extinct for the last fifty million years.

"This fish goes back to the Mesozoic era, the days of giant reptiles, dinosaurs and pterodactyls. Fossilized, it has been found in that layer of earth known as the British triassic. It belongs to the *ganoid* family, and more particularly to the genus *isopholis.*"

Captain Klinkert coughed. "Gabriel, you are a young fool, *ja,* talking so profoundly of smelly fish when you should be marrying some nice plump *meisje!*

"What kind of work is this you do for a stuffy museum, where does it get you? A man who plays rummy like you, consorting with—with mullet! *Foei!* So many times you have shipped with me on the *Apeldoorn,* each time you get older, each time no *vrouw.*"

"That's what van der Decken said. Considering the fact you are both bachelors, I'm inclined to regard it as a sort of frustration," Gabriel said. "And I'm not going to argue with you. I want to know about transportation. Is there any way I can get out of Wilhelmstad and to La Guayra on the Main in a hurry?"

"Nothing faster than an aeroplane," Captain Klinkert chuckled.

"You're a rogue. Are you kidding?"

CAPTAIN KLINKERT shook his head. "No, I am not kidding. . . . Oh, these American expressions, my *vader* would turn in his grave if he could hear me speak this American *papiamento.* Haven't you ever been to Curacao? Oil makes a land important, Gabriel, and Curacao boasts the refineries like Aruba. Also, oil brings an

airline to Wilhelmstad, the Trans-American, and I am certain you can take a ship to La Guayra, and then all the way on to Buenos Aires if you wish."

"That's good luck!" Gabriel said. "That solves everything."

"Good. So you are leaving my ship for a dead fish. I should be insulted. And we have not had a decent rummy game this voyage."

"But that's the point, don't you see? I don't want to leave the *Apeldoorn*. I have a date in Rio on the fifteenth of May, and there's no point in arriving there earlier than that. I figure to pick up the *isopholis* in Venezuela, and then catch another aeroplane, and fly on to Port of Spain in Trinidad, and meet up with you and the *Apeldoorn* there. That would be your next port after Wilhelmstad."

Captain Klinkert nodded. "*Ja*. We will not be there for almost another week. I'm taking on fuel oil here and I won't sail until tomorrow afternoon. I should be in the Gulf of Paria next Monday. You are going to bring that fish aboard?"

"Of course," Gabriel said. "Every ichthyologist in the world will envy me the time I have that fish to myself between Trinidad and Rio. I've got to identify it, classify it—"

"Fifty million years old," said Captain Klinkert. "It should smell heavenly." He held his nose and threw his eyes toward the ceiling.

Gabriel started to explain again, then desisted, for he never knew when the captain was shrewdly jocular, or ingenuously humorous.

"Then I can leave most of my things aboard and keep my cabin," he said, "and just take a few things with me on the plane. For heaven's sake, now, look for me in Port of Spain, unless I radio differently, will you?"

"*Ja*, I will look for you, Gabriel. But have a care to be there. This ship isn't my own to grow barnacles on her bottom while I wait to clear for a *dwass* American who is in love with a Mesozoic herring! I have a schedule to keep. You miss me in Port of Spain, and you don't see me again until the *Apeldoorn* reaches Bahia in Brazil."

"I'll see you in Port of Spain," Gabriel promised. "It won't take me ten minutes to get possession of that fish if it's genuine and for sale. I'll be in Trinidad long before you get there."

Captain Klinkert sighed and rose heavily from his chair, a large round man. "We are coming in soon now. I must get up to the bridge. *Ja*, they need me there, for this Shottegat Harbor is a narrow tricky thing. Big liners cannot even go in to Wilhelmstad, with their deep draft. But we will set you on the main street of Wilhelmstad, Gabriel, for a landing *plaats*. Go pack your things."

"All right," said Gabriel. "And by the way, Captain, what happened to Mr. Deechen this trip? You've got a new man in the radio shack."

"Thimm? *Aba*, he is a weasel. Deechen reported sick in New York, and they gave me Thimm. It was a last minute affair. I understood that both Deechen and Drakensberg were in a hospital. They had some sort of accident, concussions and head bruises, I heard, but I have no details." He coughed. "Have you seen my first officer?"

"I saw him once," Gabriel said. "Fritz Steuber."

"Cold fish, eh, Gabriel? To tell you the truth, I only began to appreciate that Drakensberg this trip when he wasn't along. And if Thimm is a weasel, this chief officer is a clam. He does his job and then he hibernates in his cabin. I think he is anti-social, eh?" He growled in his mustache. "Say goodby to me before you leave the ship."

"Yes, I will."

CHAPTER III

DISABLED SEAMEN

GABRIEL returned to the radio shack and permitted himself the satisfaction of ignoring the *No Admittance* sign to enter without knocking. Thimm seemed startled by the quick opening of the door, and looked annoyed.

"I'm leaving the ship," Gabriel said. "I want to send a message to New York."

Thimm nodded, with a satisfied smile, and sat down with a blank and a pencil. Gabriel stared hard at the back of the radio officer's neck and murmured, "I found out about Mr. Deechen, Thimm. He had an accident in New York."

"That was too bad."

"It seems both he and the first officer, Drakensberg, were hurt in an accident."

Thimm was studiedly cool. "Too bad. I didn't know the men."

Gabriel shrugged. "Here's my message."

"Yes, sir."

"Dr. Emmet Kaufman, Federal Museum, New York. Confirming wireless discovery *ganoid*. Stop. Proceeding by plane acquire specimen if possible. Stop. Rejoin *Apeldoorn* at Port of Spain—"

He paused and glanced at Thimm. "Are you getting it?"

"Pardon," Thimm said abruptly, a trifle pale, "my pencil point broke. You are not leaving us for good?"

"Oh, no! Where was I? Will rejoin *Apeldoorn* at Port of Spain, retaining specimen in possession until finish of Ishi congress. Will fly it home then. Reach me cable office La Guayra and Queen's Park, Port of Spain. Will telephone from Trinidad if good news. Gabriel."

Thimm looked up, and Gabriel nodded that that was all. Thimm read it back to him carefully, and then counted the words and said, "Expensive, Mr. Adams, over forty *gulden*."

"American money?"

"Fifteen dollars, twenty cents."

Gabriel paid for it then. "Are you Dutch, Thimm?"

"Yes, of course."

"You speak such excellent English," Gabriel said. "No accent whatsoever."

"True," Thimm nodded. "I've been in the United States a long time." He coughed and folded his hands. "Good luck to you, Mr. Adams. I hope you catch your fish."

"Thanks," Gabriel said.

"We shall see you again in Port of Spain."

"Yes," Gabriel said evenly. "You may count on that."

They smiled at each other with extreme politeness, and then Gabriel left and went below to his cabin.

"Now what," Gabriel wondered, "has that bird got on his mind?"

WHILE he emptied one of his lighter suitcases to repack it with essentials, he felt nervous. It was only natural, he reasoned, that the extreme excitement of such a spectacular find as the *isopholis* would knot his stomach. But Thimm disturbed him too.

Gabriel seldom disliked anyone. If things approached dislike, he preferred to avoid and ignore a man entirely; the philosophy had won him few enemies.

But there was something fascinating about the oily timidity of the man. Harmless enough, still he gave Gabriel the impression that for all his humble courtesy, he might have had a dagger in his back pocket. It was a definite impression.

When he finished packing the bag, Gabriel rang for the steward.

Under his feet, he could feel the *Apeldoorn* had slowed, and the faint faraway blows of the seas on the port side, which crept up through the steel plates to the balls of his feet like heartbeats, had disappeared.

Hans van der Decken presently knocked on the door. "Come in," Gabriel said.

Van der Decken closed the door and looked alarmed. "Why are you packing, *mijnheer?* You are leaving us? Something is wrong?"

"Sit down," Gabriel said. "I've got to fly to the Main but I'm coming back to meet up with you in Port of Spain. I'm leaving all this luggage in the cabin. You can keep an eye on it for me. . . . You didn't tell me Deechen was hurt in New York."

"Was he hurt? I didn't know that. Who told you?"

"Captain Klinkert."

"*Ja?* And Drakensberg?"

"Same complaint as Deechen. They ap-

pear to have been in an accident and sustained a similarity of injuries. Doubtless, they were together."

"Oh, said van der Decken. "Taxi probably. Those taxis—"

"Possibly but not probably," Gabriel said. "Captain Klinkert said there were only concussions and contusions on the head. Our metropolitan taxis are more lethal than to localize the injuries to that extent on two persons at the same time. Sounds more as if they had been in a fight on the short end. I've got an unconscionable hunch they were beaten up."

Van der Decken was nonplussed. "I don't understand that, *mijnheer*. Drakensberg and Deechen in a brawl? Not those two. They're married men."

"I think what I think."

"I'm sure you're wrong," Van der Decken persisted. "Really, *mijnheer*."

"Couldn't some one have paid a couple of thugs to hospitalize them so that a couple of berths would be left open on this ship? Maybe for instance, jobs are scarce, and Thimm and Steuber—"

Van der Decken laughed without the deference due a paid passenger.

"All right, all right," Gabriel said. "I wouldn't put it past Thimm. Have you met him? He doesn't like me."

"You mean he was rude, *mijnheer?*"

"Stop bristling, Hans. You're too impetuous. No, he wasn't rude. Not in a manner of speaking. He just didn't like me, and I returned his deep affection. Am I a social leper aboard here? He wasn't anxious for me to remain aboard or rejoin the ship. And don't tell me it was my imagination."

Van der Decken smiled smugly and made no reply.

GABRIEL shrugged. "I see by your Mona Lisa glow that I should be ashamed of myself for harboring thoughts of intrigue. Forgive me, Hans, forgive me. I forgot your recent thesis, all voyages are exactly the same. Take care of my baggage while I'm gone, will you? I've got an expensive projector there."

"Ja, I'll take care of it. If this bag is ready, leave it to me. You should be on deck for we are coming into the Shottegat, and Wilhelmstad is very pretty from a distance."

Gabriel got his hat and raincoat, made sure he had all his papers and then he locked his trunk.

Van der Decken took his bag up to the head of the staircase on A deck where Mr. Nardo, the purser, had his office, and waited there until Gabriel came up.

The massive Dutchman held out his hand and beamed on Gabriel.

"Have a good trip, *mijnheer!*"

Gabriel shook hands with him. "I'll see you in Trinidad and tell you all about it, Hans," he said.

His eyes twinkled. "And about that Deechen-Drakensberg fracas, it occurs to me that if I were going to seize a ship and scuttle her, the two important posts I'd take over would be chief officer and radio officer, one to take command when the captain was out of action, the other to prevent use of the transmitter to get out the foul news— Are you listening to me?"

"Every word, *mijnheer,*" van der Decken grinned. *"Gij scheerst!* We will manage to keep the poor *Apeldoorn* afloat until you come back to her."

"See that you do," Gabriel said with a smile.

A few minutes later, from the open deck, Gabriel saw the blossoming of gaudy colors which was Wilhelmstad, with its fiery scarlet, or brilliant yellow or sharp blue walls, for at Curacao nature forgot her hues, and the people of the town made up those hues in their own garish fashion, disregarding the fact that prim windows and neat steep gables of the houses belonged to a more conservative century.

Gabriel's impression of the place was that it was picturesque and immaculate; he did not have time for more than this, for it was his good fortune to make perfect connections, and within the hour, he was in the air in a Trans-American amphibian, heading southeast for La Guayra, Venezuela.

CHAPTER IV

THE LADY LETTI

FIVE days later, when the aeroplane from La Guayra left the hooked finger of the Main (which stretches eastward toward Trinidad, creating at the meeting, a strait known as the Bocas del Dragon) Gabriel found himself above the glistening Gulf of Paria.

The day was windless, the shallow Gulf below calm, with the exception of cats-paws which caught up the sun and sparkled brilliantly.

They made the water look beautiful; actually, it was not, for the Orinoco Delta close by left the Gulf a constant murky brown.

The sun flashes on the surface reminded Gabriel of his prize exhibit in the Federal Museum, far away at that moment, which had suffered from the single flaw of this same light reflection.

The exhibit was a masterpiece, a habitat of Florida Keys fishes, so real in their gorgeous colors as they poised above sea anemones and undulating seaweed as to make Dr. Kaufman, the curator, remark, "Gabriel, they have been petrified by a Medusa! It is magnificent! You wait for the spell to break and for the fish to flash away. Excellent job!" Except for the glass pane which had picked up the light reflections and spoiled the whole thing.

Gabriel had later replaced it with polarized glass.

He watched the sun flashes through his port, aware that he was tired. Five days of anticipation, climaxed with the possession of a prehistoric prize was too much for him.

He thought of the *Apeldoorn* again and longed for the quiet routine of existence aboard her. He was glad the chase was over. He did not even feel eager to examine his specimen minutely, although his inspection had been cursory. Before it was packed in La Guayra.

It was hard to remember everything.

Fatigue confused his picture of the majestic red mountains of Venezuela which rose precipitously from the sea, with the unshaved stubble of Mr. Bragge's chin, with the unspeakable ugliness and squalor of La Guayra itself, with the amazing Portugee fisherman who had netted the *isopholis,* and with the paltry figure of one hundred pesos for which he had bought the *ganoid.*

Fatigue dulled everything, even elation, and when the dark green of Trinidad broke on the rim of the Gulf of Paria, with the city of Port of Spain on the plain northward, before its backdrop of mountains, Gabriel Adams sighed thankfully and strained to see some sign of the S.S. *Apeldoorn* which was not due and had not arrived, naturally.

When a landing had been effected, Gabriel followed the Queen's Park porter to his car and went out to the other end of Port of Spain where he registered at the Inn, asked not to be disturbed, and repaired to his room, carrying the boxed prehistoric fish himself, refusing to allow a porter to touch it.

He locked his door, hastily climbed into a pair of pyjamas, and fell asleep. He did not awaken until the following morning, at eleven, when the rapping of a porter announced the fact that there was a radiogram for him from New York.

ALL Dr. Emmet Kaufman asked was that Gabriel telephone him at the earliest possible convenience. Gabriel couldn't help grinning. The long sleep had refreshed him; half sitting up in his bed, he began to appreciate the same sense of excitement which the old boy was catching in New York.

Some sadistic quirk made him consider holding poor Kaufman up in the air a little while longer. In New York, the suspense must have been horrible, after his brief cable from La Guayra:

FISH GENUINE ONE HUNDRED PESOS
DEAL CLOSED ON TO TRINIDAD

But he resisted the impulse, and put through his call. When the connection was completed, he was surprised at the clarity of the impulses, for although Dr. Kauf-

man sounded far away, his voice was remarkably clear. "Hello, doctor," Gabriel said.

"In the name of heaven," Dr. Kaufman shouted, "tell me about it! You didn't have to be so close-mouthed with your cable! The museum is paying for it. Genuine fish indeed! What is it?"

"It's a wonderful specimen of *Isopholis Orthostomus,*" Gabriel said with certain pride. "Really wonderful. The enamel armour plates on the head are in excellent condition, and the teeth superb. Scales rhombic. An overdeveloped opercle. High dorsal fin. Oh, the real thing!"

"How was it caught? Where—"

"A Portuguese named Lasca," Gabriel said, "netted it from a trawler not far off the northwest of Cayo Grande.

"He said he dropped his nets to a mile depth and when this thing came up among the other fish, he knew it wasn't an ordinary fish and he thought it might be worth something. He skinned it and brought the skin over."

"You didn't get the bones?"

"No, lost them. He discarded them. Too bad. I had the thing mounted in La Guayra, rotten job, but it will do for the time being. You can thank your favorite star for the chance that sent Lasca to Bragge."

"Gabriel, listen," said Dr. Kaufman. "I want you to go to your Lloyd's agent in Port of Spain and insure that fish. That's a very valuable thing and we've got to cover ourselves. If anything happened to it— Insure it for ten thousand dollars . . . Amazing! Incredible! Makes a man believe in sea serpents. It's possible—"

"This is costing money," Gabriel said.

"All right. Keep in touch with me. Goodbye."

GABRIEL hung up. He felt pretty good. He took a bath, shaved and then dressed in his white linen, which was still respectable, and went down to lunch.

The dining room was out of doors, and very large. He felt human again. He sat at his table, ordered. When he had finished, and the waiter had left the table, he glanced around at the multitude of diners.

They were tourists, largely, and he assumed a cruise ship must have come in. His eyes fell, presently, upon a young woman opposite him across the room.

For a moment, he had had an impression that he was being stared at; he looked again and with a little unpleasant shock decided he was right.

Gabriel avoided her eyes, for her stare was frank and unwavering. She wasn't trying to—flirt, he supposed was the word. She looked perplexed, as though she thought she knew him. He had never seen her before in his life.

He hastily drank his glass of water and saw her rising from her table to come toward him. "Oh Lord," he groaned.

Keeping his glance averted so that there would be no possibility of encouragement, Gabriel toyed with a spoon, wishing vainly for the waiter. The girl came to his table, seemed to pass by, then she tapped him on the shoulder.

Gabriel looked up at her. She said, "Hello."

She was very pretty, he had to admit.

He hadn't considered her looks, other than the fact that she was definitely female, when he first saw her. But close to him, she was pretty in a Dresden China way, her features small and delicate, her skin naturally pale. Her mouth was sharp and—Gabriel thought—cruel. But then, most pretty women were apt to look cruel.

She smiled at him pleasantly, her eyes very wide. Myopic, he diagnosed; for the pupils were large and dark and she showed too much of the whites.

"I'm afraid you've made a mistake," he said, not too severely. "I don't believe I've ever had the pleasure."

"Of course you haven't," she said. "But I know you. I've seen you often in New York, but you were always busy on some exhibit or other. You're Gabriel Adams."

Gabriel was astounded. He had already sprung to his feet. "But that's right!"

"Of course it's right," she said. Her laughter was gay and unresentful. "Did you think I was trying to pick you up?

Uncle Emmet would die of sheer horror if his favorite niece went bursting around the tropics flirting with every white linen suit in port! Oh, really!"

"You're Dr. Kaufman's niece?"

"Yes. I'm Letti Gaynor. No *e*. Silly name, isn't it? Hasn't he mentioned me?"

"As a matter of fact, no," Gabriel said. "Dr. Kaufman doesn't mix his personal affairs with the museum staff, so it's not—"

"Then he's an old hypocrite," said Letti wryly, "for he talks about you enough outside his fossilized old office."

"That's flattering. Won't you join me?"

"Love to," she said. "I hate to eat alone, and I was just sitting there dreading the whole thing when you came in. I thought I recognized you. Then when you sat down, I was certain.

"Whatever are you doing in Port of Spain? If you tell me that you came in on the *Santa Rosa* yesterday—" She gritted her fine white teeth. "I've been bored to death the whole cruise so far, and if I found out you'd been aboard all the time, it would really be too much."

"Oh, I see," Gabriel said. "This is a stopover for the *Santa Rosa*. You're taking a South American cruise?"

"Yes. Dad thought I was getting night-club pallor in New York, and he all but shanghaied me. Said I needed sun and sea air. Well, I've had enough sea and air to do me a lifetime, thank you. And I'm such a poor sailor." For an instant she seemed to sober, and he had the unpleasant sensation that she was measuring him. . . .

CHAPTER V

THE GIRL WORKS FAST

THE waiter arrived and Gabriel requested a menu which he gave to Letti Gaynor. She glanced at it vaguely and then handed it back and said, "Oh, anything—I'll have the same as you. I'm not really hungry. I'm too excited! A real live man!

"Really, Gabriel—do you mind—there are nothing but women aboard that ship, and finding some one to dance with at night is akin to braving a bargain basement. The competition is ghastly—you haven't answered my question."

"I flew in from the Main last night," Gabriel said. "I'm en route to Rio."

Her eyes brightened. "You mean you're going down on my boat? Rio is our next port!" She laughed. "I know I'm indecent, with my talons in you, but we could have such fun—"

"No," Gabriel said, lending a polite note of regret. "I'm terribly sorry. I'm going down on another boat, a slow freighter."

"Oh," Letti murmured, her face falling. "That's a shame."

"Why?"

"Because you're good-looking and I'm lonely."

Gabriel laughed. "I've already been in passage aboard the *Apeldoorn*, and my baggage is still aboard her. She's not due until tomorrow morning."

"But the *Santa Rose* won't sail until tomorrow noon. You could swing it if you were a gallant blade." She raised her eyes at him. They looked enormous.

Gabriel was silent with embarrassment. He didn't want to be rude. "I'm sorry," he said.

"What will Uncle Emmet say?"

"Off with my head! That is, if you tell on me."

"I won't," Letti said, pouting. "But I wish you'd change your mind. You aren't a bit flattering. What else can I do? I've all but thrown myself at you. Will you show me around Trinidad, at least, until I sail?"

"That I can do," Gabriel said. "And a pleasure. I've one matter to take care of first, then I'll pick you up at your room and escort you."

She sighed just so. "That's *much* better. That gives me more time to work on you. Go ahead and eat."

She was, Gabriel mused, very charming, and one of the most dexterous liars he had ever met. He had been inclined to think at first, because of her pretty face, that she was stupid. She was canny and daring and dangerous. She was also mystifying, and predatory.

And—thank heavens—she was near-sighed. That was important.

BY TELEPHONE, Gabriel heard that the Lloyd's agent was a man named Clements Leeds, who was associated with the Atlantic Limited office on Frederick Street near Marine Square. But Mr. Leeds wasn't it.

Gabriel explained what he wanted in the way of coverage, the policy to be in force during his trip south on the *Apeldoorn,* during his stay in Rio, and during his flight back to the United States.

The office said that Mr. Leeds would get in touch with him later in the day.

"I expect to be away most of the day," Gabriel said. "How about tonight?"

"Very well, Mr. Adams. I'll give the details to Mr. Leeds when he comes in."

Gabriel was satisfied.

He locked his room and found Letti Gaynor's on the same floor and knocked. She opened it instantly, wide-eyed. "So soon? I thought you'd take a long time."

"I'm ready to go," Gabriel said. "Have you anything in mind or would you rather leave it to me?"

"Always leave it to a man," she said. "But take me out of Port of Spain. I've seen enough of it. I've seen the Savannah, and the Government House and the Customs House—"

"You haven't been 'Over the Saddle' in this short time," he interrupted. "Suppose I hire a car and drive us out. And you omitted the Botanic Gardens, which you ought to see. We'll stop there on the way home. It's getting late now. I don't know how far we can go."

They went far enough, taking the road south out of the city into the sugar field country.

Gabriel drove slowly, and it grew late. They returned at five, turned in the car, and then took a trolley back to the Savannah where they entered the Botanic Garden, spurned the offer of a guide, and wandered along the footpaths. The greenhouse orchids were in bloom and looked gorgeous.

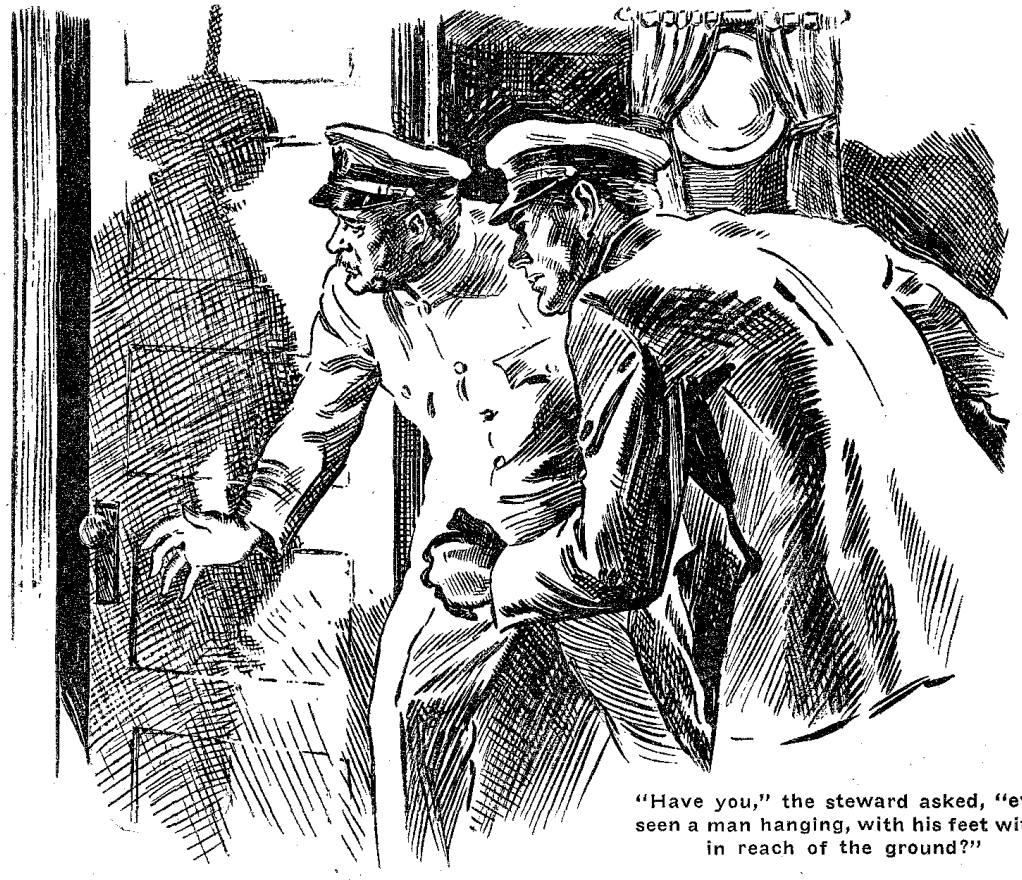
They left here and followed a stream through a cool ravine where Letti finally paused, still holding his hand which she had been swinging. "Gabriel, you've been very nice to me."

"How would you have me be?" he said.

"No, but you have. I expect I acted like a young fool this morning. But it was good to see you. And it was so sweet of you to take care of me. I get frantic by myself, I can't stand to be alone. That's why I'd like you to come on the *Rosa* with me. You could get a cabin and switch your luggage."

Gabriel regarded her with cool passivity and did not reply.

"Please," she whispered. "Be nice to me." She reached up and pulled his face down so calmly and firmly that she took him unawares, and she kissed him on the mouth.



"Have you," the steward asked, "ever seen a man hanging, with his feet within reach of the ground?"

GABRIEL ADAMS, mild-mannered young member of the Federal Museum staff, finds something decidedly disturbing in the atmosphere aboard the Dutch freighter, the S.S. *Apeldoorn*. On his way to the International Congress of Herpetologists and Ichthyologists, which Gabriel claims is just an elaborate name for fish-fanciers, he is making his eighth trip south on the *Apeldoorn;* and definitely all is not as usual.

He misses RADIO OFFICER DEECHEN and CHIEF OFFICER DRAKENSBERG, cronies from previous passages. It appears they were injured just before sailing time, and a description of their injuries leads Gabriel to wonder if they were not perhaps beaten up. He certainly does not care for the taciturn THIMM and the sour-faced STEUBER who have taken their places.

Even more mysterious is the fact that Gabriel is the only passenger aboard. Both CAPTAIN KLINKERT and the cheerful steward, VAN DER DECKEN, try to make light of these peculiar circumstances, but Gabriel is worried. If he, thinks Gabe, were planning to seize a ship for some nefarious purpose, the first two members of the crew he would want on his side would be the chief officer and the radio-man. He can't resist saying as much to Klinkert and van der Decken before he leaves the boat at Willemstad to collect a specimen for the museum. The specimen is a fish believed to have been extinct for fifty million years; but this particular member *ganoid isophilis* family was caught only a day or two before by a Portuguese fisherman off the coast of La Guayra.

THIMM, the radio man, seems oddly pleased to learn that Gabe is leaving the ship; and is obviously disappointed when Gabe tells him he plans to rejoin the *Apeldoorn* at Port of Spain.

While waiting for the *Apeldoorn,* at Trinidad, his precious grandfather-of-all-fish tucked under his arm, Gabriel runs into an odd and extremely pretty girl who calls herself LETTI GAYNOR and claims be the niece of Gabriel's superior at the museum.

Letti exerts every possible pressure on Gabriel to make him change his mind about the *Apeldoorn* and to join her cruise-ship for the rest of the trip to Rio. Gabriel, after a few hours in her company, decides that she is a very charming and accomplished liar; also that she is canny, daring, and very, very dangerous. He finds comfort in the fact that she is so obviously nearsighted.

When all of Letti's cajoleries have failed, she makes the obvious last move. She puts her arms around his neck and kisses him with great firmness and skill upon the mouth. . . .

CHAPTER VI

CHECKMATE, DEAR LADY

HIS first inclination was to withdraw in confusion, but he stifled it, relaxed and did nothing. He did not touch her himself. Her face close to his, those charmingly myopic, eloquent eyes melting with appeal, she kissed him once again with great gusto and released him.

Gabriel said, after a pause for the needful breath, "Not much fun, is it? Like kissing an old rather dry stick." He shook his head. "What a girl will think of to do!"

Letti stood appalled and uncomfortable. It was not what he was supposed to say. It was not what any man was supposed to say under the circumstances. The tender eyes took on a steely tone and her mouth quivered. She did not reply at once. She stepped back a little. "I—I don't know what you mean, Gabriel—"

"Of course you do," he said sternly. "It's been a lot of sport playing the game, and I've enjoyed it. Yes I may say I enjoyed it enormously. Up to and perhaps including the point when you felt it necessary to use sex as a weapon. That is where I get off."

"Don't be stuffy," she said, forcing a note of lightness into her voice. "You were nice to me. So I kissed you. I always kiss people who are nice to me. I'm impulsive, you might say, about people. All sorts of people."

"People you want to sail on the *Santa Rosa* with you? Why do you want *me* on the *Santa Rosa,* Letti? And we can drop all this blather about you being Dr. Kaufman's niece because I don't believe it.

"My dear, you can't see much of anything without your glasses, can you? I noticed them in your purse today. Nearsighted. Yet you tried to tell me you recognized me across that dining-room. I was only a white linen blur to you.

"You had tipped the waiter to tell you when Gabriel Adams came in. I noticed he asked me my name. I don't believe you came in on the *Santa Rosa* at all. Well, that's the way I see it. Do you want to take it from there?"

LETTI GAYNOR sat down against a sloping rock and stared at her shoes without a word.

"Listen to the thunderous roar of silence," Gabriel said. "But there are things you can tell me. How did you know my name in the first place—why were you interested in it—how did you know I was in Port of Spain—"

"Wait a minute," Letti murmured with a shrug. She stood up, came over and extended her hand. "Shake, Gabriel. You win."

Gabriel shook it. "The deception? I'm not so sure. You're still ahead of me."

She said, "No matter what I told you now, you wouldn't believe it. I might as well tell you the truth. It's the fish."

Gabriel looked blank. "What fish?"

"Never mind the four-months-old-expression. I mean the extinct fish, the *ganoid,* the *isosceles.*"

"*Isophilis,*" said Gabriel, patient but firm. "You're a very remarkable young woman. Tell me more."

"It's very simple, my boy. The Federal Museum let it sort of dribble out that

the fish had been captured, and that Kaufman had sent you to get it. I happen to represent a man, who wants it too. He was willing to pay me a thousand dollars if I got it ahead of you."

"This is getting weirder and weirder—but please don't let me stop you."

"The job was to find out where it was. My informant didn't know that. So the next best thing was to get a line on you. I called Dr. Emmet Kaufman of the Federal Museum and said I had news for you that was urgent and that I wanted to reach you. He gave me the Queen's Park Inn address. After that it was simple. I just flew down by Pan-American."

"I see," Gabriel studied her. "And how did you expect to get the fish ahead of me?"

"Well—it's embarrassing to say it now because I didn't have much luck—but I thought you might be attracted to me enough to let me come along. I didn't expect you to take me up on the *Santa Rosa* thing, but I thought you might suggest that it would be fun if I went with you, wherever you were going to get the fish."

"AND then beat me out?" Gabriel said. "I was to think you just a pretty girl along with me, and not a designing fish-snatcher, eh? I suppose from a woman's viewpoint that's a logical story. It's so good that I hate to break your heart by telling you that I already own the fish."

Letti groaned, but nicely, and ran her hand through the summit of curls on the top of her head. "Oh, well that tears it then. All this Mata Hari intrigue for nothing. And you never even dropped a hint."

Gabriel smiled. "Am I to assume that your quest was legitimate and that attempts at hijacking are beyond the pale?"

"Gabriel, the fish is legally yours, so that is that. I just lost one thousand dollars. But the trip was nice." She smiled at him provocatively, "And you were nice too."

"Thanks."

"Now that we understand each other, will we dance tonight?"

"Now that we understand each other," he replied heavily, "I don't see the necessity of continuing any relationship at all."

"You *are* an old stick."

"I said so myself."

"And you still don't trust me."

Gabriel said slowly, "I trust you implicitly, Letti. Yes, in one short day, I can trust you with any task requiring deception. You have a perfect flair for fabrication, and you do it *damned* well. But the only man in New York who knew about the *ganoid* was Dr. Kaufman himself, as close-mouthed a clam as ever kept a secret. So if I saw you again, you'd have to tell me still another story, and I wouldn't believe that either. And gradually it would become monotonous. I would be bored and you would get angry, and we'd both despise each other. No—let's leave it on a wasted-kiss note. Rueful, but charming."

Letti's face was flushed with anger, but her voice was steady enough. "You're laughing at me."

"That's the way it is," Gabriel said. "I'll confess that you're completely fascinating. A pistol in your handbag—oh, yes, I glimpsed it—and your spectacles, unused but needed. And the word is *isopholis,* Letti, not *isosceles* which is a geometric triangle. You did the best you could remembering it that quickly. Is that enough?"

"That's plenty," Letti said quietly. She seemed tiny and helpless. And pathetic, until Gabe remembered that was probably the only line of approach left to her. "What are you going to do with me?"

"Nothing," Gabriel replied. "It's obvious you won't tell me anything to enlighten me on all this. And it should be obvious to you that I'm not changing my plans and deserting the *Apeldoorn*—" He paused, electrified. He grabbed her arms and stared hard at her. "Do you know a man named Thimm? Rudolph Thimm?"

Her face remained a perfect blank, but she had too much control of it. Her eyes did not cloud in the slightest. "No," she said. "I never heard of him."

But that was the answer, nevertheless. Only two people besides himself and Dr.

Kaufman knew about the *ganoid* at all. Captain Klinkert and Rudolph Thimm. Klinkert could not possibly have remembered such details from their conversation whereas Thimm had had all the details in writing. It was painfully obvious that this charming little liar was hand in glove with Thimm. The purpose of the ruse not only escaped Gabriel, it flabbergasted him. But all he said was, "Never mind." No pal of Thimm's was likely to turn out to be much of a chatterbox.

He released her and motioned at the footpath. "It's getting dark. We'd better go back. After I deliver you at the Queen's Park, I think it should be agreed mutually that our social relationship has terminated. Don't you think so?"

"That might be a good idea," Letti answered coolly.

She left his side and retreated through the glade along the footpath. Gabriel followed her. Before they reached the greenhouse, a guide picked them up, thinking perhaps the darkness had caused them to go astray. He delivered them back to the Inn. There were no more words. Not even *adieux*. Gabe thought the game was over, which only goes to prove how crazy a bright young ichthyologist can be.

CHAPTER VII

THE WOMAN INTERVENES

AFTER dinner, Gabriel repaired to the broad veranda where most of the guests were sitting and talking in the cool breeze off the gulf.

He waited until nine o'clock, watching the moon beyond the dark hills, but Mr. Clements Leeds did not put in an appearance. Gabriel went into the lobby and asked the desk clerk if there had been any calls for him. There had been none.

From the desk, he telephoned the Atlantic Limited office himself, but could not raise them. Gabriel felt uneasy and annoyed, for he wanted to take care of the risk-policy and forget it. He didn't feel actually that there was any necessity for insuring the *ganoid,* for although it was extremely valuable, it was not valuable in terms of dollars and cents.

It was a rare find, but he could take care of it well enough. Confreres wouldn't give a thought to purloining it. That was ridiculous. He smiled, thinking of Letti's childish story.

The idea wasn't to speculate in dollars and cents. Ten thousand dollars wouldn't repay the loss of the fish, and at the same time, the fish wasn't worth that much. But Dr. Kaufman was the boss and wanted the policy, and where was Leeds?

Frustrated, Gabriel called the Customs House and asked them when the *Apeldoorn* was due to arrive, thinking that they would have heard by wireless.

"The S.S. *Apeldoorn,* Royal Dutch Lines?"

"Yes, please."

"She has already arrived," said the customs house. "She dropped anchor in the Gulf at eight-thirty this evening."

"That's good news. Early, wasn't she?"

"Yes."

"Do you suppose it would be possible to board her tonight? I'm one of her passengers, left her at Wilhelmstad and planned to pick her up here. I'd like—"

"I'm certain it will be impossible to board her this evening," said the customs house, very stern and official. "No one is being allowed aboard, and no one aboard has shore leave. Port authorities are aboard her now in response to a wireless from her master.

"I can't tell you any more than this. But I'm sure you can go out to her first thing in the morning. She's lying due west of the Customs House, about a half mile offshore. Mud deposits make the Gulf shallow in here, y'know, and her draft won't let her come in too close."

"I know," Gabriel said, burning with curiosity, "Thanks." He replaced the telephone, biting his mouth. What on earth did Captain Klinkert want the Port Authorities aboard for? What had happened?

It was well after nine. He nodded good night to the desk clerk, remarked that

he was checking out early in the morning and would like his bill ready then, and went upstairs to his room.

He unlocked the door and went in.

THE electric light showed him that his things were not in order. The twin doors opening onto the small balcony that ran around the inside square of the Inn were open. He was sure he had not left them that way.

Gabriel stepped through them hastily, standing on the balcony. It was quite dark out there; the light in his room cast a yellow blanket of light over his white-clad form.

To right and left, he could see nothing. Whoever it was, had gone.

He returned to his room, closed the doors and ran to the packaged *ganoid*. It was intact. It had not been touched. The twine had not been tampered with at all.

He thought next of his bag. He had left it, closed, on the floor of the closet. He opened the closet door and received a shock.

The bag was open, and although his things were still in it, they had been messed about thoroughly. On top of his clothes was his leather manuscript-case with his reports for the Rio congress, and his credentials from the Federal Museum. The case was open, the papers disturbed, but nothing had been taken.

Gabriel sat down on the edge of the bed and worried. They weren't even being careful. And he hadn't the mistiest notion who *they* were.

Gabriel telephoned downstairs. "Has anyone been in my room today?" Trying to sound merely normally angry, as if he suspected nothing beyond the incursions of a hotel-thief.

The desk clerk said, "The maid cleaned it, Mr. Adams."

"I locked the door," he snapped, warming up to his impersonation of an irascible American tourist.

"Yes, but she has a passkey. Is anything wrong?"

"I don't know," Gabriel said. "I think perhaps—No, I'll think it over." He slammed down the receiver, rather hoping that *they* had been listening in.

Nothing had been stolen. When he was sure of this, he repacked his things, frowning furiously. The maid hadn't touched his bag, certainly. Why would she? Letti Gaynor? But how had she got in?

He called the desk clerk again. "Is the room next to me unoccupied?"

"Yes," said the desk clerk. "The room on your left. Mr. Adams, is anything wrong? Has there been a theft? I'll call the police—"

"Nothing's wrong," Gabriel said. "I've thought it over. I must be mistaken. I don't want a fuss. You can skip the police." He hung up.

So Letti—Letti being his nearest approach to an idea of *they*—could have gone through the unoccupied room, onto the balcony, and into his room from the balcony. He wondered whether she would have had the courage for a job like that. It was a man's sort of work.

And the evidence pointed to the fact that someone had attempted to establish his identity and profession, nothing more. But already Letti knew all that. She'd known it when she'd struck up the acquaintance.

He became worried about the fish and decided to unwrap it to make sure it was safe. This he did, swearing at the knots, for he had tied them tightly. He finally shed the twine, unfolded the paper and then pried up the edge of the box which came easily; the Customs men had already done it once and broadened the nail holes.

Isopholis Orthotomous was still there. Gabriel lifted off the cover completely to stare at the fish, fascinated.

The taxidermy job was amateurish, of course, and yet the fish retained a brusque realism. It was five feet long, looking not unlike a short-nosed gar, or a barracuda. But the mouth of savage teeth put the barracuda's to shame; the teeth were large and myriad in both jaws.

Finally it was the head which set the

fish off from contemporary fish. It was plated with hard shining scales of an enamel-like substance called *ganoin;* its function was akin to the helmet of a knight of another day. This same *ganoin* was apparent in the rhombic scales of the fish.

It was a ferocious-looking thing, as a barracuda is ferocious, but it looked more sinister, which is a pretty good trick, too —the barracuda being roughly the Bela Lugosi of the finny family.

GABRIEL turned, startled, at the tap on the door. He started to force the lid on the box again, then stopped. "Who's there?"

"Letti." Her voice was soft and low.

"For heaven's sake," he said exasperated. "Haven't we had enough of that? I've had my bedtime story, and at this hour the ludicrous products of your imagination are quite—"

"I've got news for you," Letti said. "Please, Gabriel, I swear I'm telling you the truth. Of course you don't believe that —but I must see you. Something terrible has happened."

Her voice was urgent now; it held a thin note of hysteria. Her quick breathing was audible.

Gabriel didn't like it. It was late, the Inn was quiet. There was too much trouble possible. Scandal, if nothing else, if he should be caught with a woman in his room. Of all women, this one. What would Dr. Kaufman say? What would the Congress of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists say? "Get out of here!" Gabriel snapped. "I'm going to call the manager—" That sounded merely hysterical and ridiculous, so he shut up.

To his horror, he saw the door opening.

Letti slipped in with alacrity, slammed it shut. It was rotten luck, but in the excitement of finding his room disturbed earlier, he had forgotten to turn the key. Eyeing Letti with mixed apprehension and appreciation, his worst fears were confirmed.

She was in a nightdress, with a sleek satin robe over her. Her eyes were shining strangely and she was quite pale, panting with excitement; her mouth was quivering. It took nerve. It took lots of nerve. She began to scream.

Gabriel tried to stop that. He moved toward her, appalled, then paused. It would only be worse if he touched her. She might prove what she so obviously intended to charge. "Get out—get out—" he said. But she cringed into a corner, terrified now of what he might do actually in reprisal for the trickery; when she screamed again, it was in earnest. She was afraid of him.

Gabriel stood stock-still, shivering with rage and frustration. There was nothing he could do, not a damned thing! It made him furious, left him cold and empty. If he attempted to flee—if he touched her—

And then, from the darkness of his adjoining bathroom, a clear crisp voice emanated, reassuring and warm. It was the voice of another woman, casual, cultured and beautiful. "My word, what on earth is all the racket?"

She came in, and Gabriel saw her for the first time. Letti Gaynor saw her too, and gasped sharply. There were no more screams.

She was tall and graceful, lithe, her hair golden, her face oval, plaintive and lovely. There was a faint sardonic touch around her mouth, and her chin was firm. Somehow, she did not startle him. Nothing could have startled him after Letti's cries.

She was playing it straight, having heard every word, having deduced the deception, and Gabriel, with a prolonged inhalation, joined her instantly.

"It's amazing," he said. "This sweet young thing claims I seduced her. Or something. Messy."

The mouth became more jocular as it broke into a slow, splendid smile. "Isn't that a little ridiculous, Gabriel? I mean, with your wife in the same room? Rather difficult. Who is she? Why don't you call the police?"

"Her name is Letti Gaynor, and she took me by surprise. I haven't been able to move. But it's an excellent idea—"

CHAPTER VIII

THE WITNESS IS DEAD

LETTI GAYNOR flashed through the door and was gone. Gabriel went to the door and looked down the hall. But she had disappeared. Some one was coming up the stairs. Gabriel took a quick glimpse.

He stepped back into the room. "Desk clerk coming up—noise—" he said quickly.

She was still unruffled. "Leave the door open as it is. I've been visiting with you. I'll take care of the rest." She spoke quietly. Gabriel could barely hear her.

The next moment, the perturbed face of the desk clerk appeared in the dimness of the hall at the door. He knocked rapidly and called to Gabriel. "I had a call downstairs—some one was shrieking here—" He saw the tall girl and he looked surprised. She smiled at him and his face sagged, relaxed. "Hello, Miss Leeds. I didn't know you were up here."

"I'm terribly sorry," Miss Leeds replied. "I'm afraid I caused all the trouble, Monty, but it was the biggest mouse I've ever seen, and I can't stand the creatures—"

"Don't blame you for running up," Gabriel said. "She nearly turned my hair white."

"Oh well," said the desk clerk. "A mouse!" He laughed soundly in relief. "It sounded like a murder! That's quite all right. I'm sorry to have bothered you."

"Think nothing of it."

"Good night."

The instant the clerk disappeared, Miss Leeds said urgently, "Did she get away?"

"She has a room in the hotel."

"Then, seriously, I'd telephone the police and do something about it. The little beast was in earnest, she could have made trouble for you. It's a nasty thing to be mixed with."

"I can't call the police," said Gabriel. "I guess she knows that. She'd like me to call them because that will hold me up and keep me in Port of Spain. I haven't any intention of remaining here. I'm going out tomorrow. That's all I ask of anyone."

"Was that it?" said Miss Leeds. "I knew it wasn't blackmail. She'd have bargained with you. It turned my blood cold when she started screaming. I mean, I was in there, all unsuspecting, worrying about my own predicament, and then—well, my word! It wasn't pleasant! You're Gabriel Adams. I heard her call to you."

Gabriel nodded, having a quiet sigh. He looked at her in awe. "And what is my wife's name?"

"Leeds."

"I know that. I heard Monty."

"Merrill."

Gabriel liked it. It suited her. "You're a very lovely woman. You know that?"

"Yes," Merrill replied wryly. "I work at it. Very hard."

"You're English."

"I was born in Burnley, but I came out here with my Dad when I was very, very young."

"I hope," Gabriel said, "you don't think I'm getting unnecessarily inquisitive, Merrill. But you've put me in an awkward situation. On the one hand, I'm in the hole to you. Honestly, I'm grateful to you for the wonderful entrance. Bernhardt never made a better one."

"Thank you." She nodded, appraising him.

"On the other hand," he continued, "what the devil were you doing in my room, having searched my luggage, perused my private papers and generally acted like a common second-story burglar?" He searched her eyes, but they were cool gray and imperturbable. She looked amused.

"You're not really angry," she said.

"How can I be? But that doesn't mean I don't want to be. I've been pushed around ever since I flew into this burg and I'm getting tired of it. I may look like one of those passive souls who keeps letting destiny stick out a foot and trip me and do nothing about it, but that isn't so. I'm getting sick of it."

MERRILL LEEDS seemed not to have heard him. She came over to him and stared down at the armour-headed *paleozoic*

who reclined on his starboard side in the box. "Have you a cigarette?" she asked.

Gabriel gave her one, took one himself, lighted both. "What's this, the fish you wanted bonded?"

"Yes," said Gabriel. "How do you know about that?"

"Oh, really, I thought you'd assumed the answer by now. I'm Clements Leeds' daughter."

"You are? That makes it even worse. I don't get it, none of it, at this point. I've been waiting for your father to write this risk and he never showed up. I called again tonight and couldn't reach him. The office was closed."

"Well, Gabriel, I'm afraid you'll be disappointed, but I'm almost certain the chances of insuring this fish are nil."

Merrill cocked her head slightly and went to the open door and shut it. Then she returned and sat down and tipped the chair back slightly against the wall, watching him. There was something tomboyish in the act.

Gabriel frowned at her and crushed out his cigarette in a tray. "You mean that? I can't insure the *ganoid?*"

"I'm 'fraid not," she said. "Nor anything else you have with you. Nor yourself. What did you call the monster—a *ganoid?* Never heard of it. And after seeing the thing, I haven't an idea why you'd want to insure it anyhow. You can catch barracudas like that any day of the week."

Gabriel sighed heavily, not inclined to be indulgent. "This particular fish has been believed extinct for the last fifty million years, yet it was caught, netted alive off Cayo Grande last week."

"Well, well," she replied with a glint in her eyes. "I know I'm supposed to be awed and impressed, jaw agape, eyes popping, what not. But while it's a rare scientific find, no doubt, the ugly thing is a phantasmagoria come true, and it's probably just as well the world has been spared the sight of it for that long. Pre-history has always left me apathetic anyway because its emphasis was always on discord."

"Nonsense," Gabriel said.

"Oh, come on now, that toothy torpedo didn't evolve those bony patches on the skull to keep the dampness out?"

"Merrill, you're a very clever girl. But you can stop dragging these verbal red herrings around and tell me the truth. What's wrong with me? Why can't this fish be insured?"

"I only know that Dad said that if you were sailing on the S.S. *Apeldoorn,* there was to be no policy, and if you were not, he'd be glad to take care of you."

"It's a pleasure to hear an honest answer," Gabriel said. "Now take it from there. Why were you in my things?"

"Because Dad asked me to check on you and see if you were really an American with a travel bug, or whether you were someone else with possible ulterior motives. Obviously, you're the former."

"What business is it of your father's who I am, since he has no intention of concluding a policy with me?"

MERRILL LEEDS left the chair and put out her cigarette. She was close to him and she met his gaze with frankness. "Do you know a man named Cumstock aboard the Dutch boat?"

"Yes. Second officer."

She nodded. "The answer to your question lies somewhere between my father and Second Officer Cumstock. I only knew that Dad received an important air mail letter from Cumstock which had been sent from Santo Domingo, Dominica."

"Before our call at Wilhelmstad," Gabriel said. "We put in there overnight on the way down. But Cumstock is a friend of mine. He wouldn't have any question about me."

"I've done you an honor by telling you this much," she replied. "I don't usually talk so much, but you've a fine aptitude for naïveté which cries for a woman's protection."

She laughed cheerfully. "I'll let you out from under my wing now and say good night. I don't think Letti will bother you again although she's certain to use her sense and know I couldn't possibly be your wife.

I'm happy to have met you, Gabriel, and perhaps some time we may meet again."

"Wait a minute," Gabriel said, panicked. He caught her elbow and brought her around. "You can't—just go off like this."

"Why not?"

"I've only met you."

"How nice of you. But the fact remains you're sailing in the morning, and I live here. Can't pull the facts together."

"I'm only going to Rio," he said. "I'll be coming back."

"Are you making love to me?"

"I didn't mean that," he said. "I'm not sure what I do mean, only I'm terribly grateful to you for this good turn, and it seems wrong for you to go off without my —well—doing something in return. You don't understand. That was a very nasty situation."

"I understand," Merrill Leeds said. "I don't imagine anything would be more horrible to a respectable archeologist than to spend a night in the local gaol under a charge of attempted seduction or whatever the girl had in mind." Her voice was dry.

"You couldn't have looked over my papers very well," Gabriel said. "I'm hardly an archeologist."

"Oh well, whatever the status is. It's eminently respectable, you must admit."

Gabriel decided to smile. "And a waste of time, from your tone of voice, eh? We can't all be world beaters. I like my job. What do you do?"

"Just about the same as you," she said. "Nothing, respectably."

He winced. "But you appear to lend your father a helping hand now and then. There's one thing about this whole business that I'd like to know. This letter that your father got from Mr. Cumstock. It concerned my ship, obviously, the *Apeldoorn*. Was it so important as to warrant your behaving like a second-story man in preference to just asking me outright for my credentials?"

She said, at once, "Yes, it must have been. Dad advised me to use discretion and secrecy. He was quite disturbed and while he didn't reveal anything to me—as he wouldn't, if you knew him—I know him well enough to guess that there is a possibility of serious trouble with the ship."

"I CAN corroborate that by telling you Mr. Cumstock is a sober, serious, and completely God-fearing gentleman who hasn't a sensational bone in his body, and wouldn't think of getting in touch with a Lloyd's man unless he had definite evidence of something dire," said Gabriel. "Putting two and two together, I get a picture of a possible scuttling. Am I right? Wouldn't your father be protecting his company from payment of insurance losses if the *Apeldoorn* were to be sunk premeditatedly?"

"I really must go," she said, refusing to reply.

Gabriel sighed. "I suppose so. Well, this was the most exciting entrance and the most alacritous exit of my life. I hope you give me the chance to do you right someday."

"Goodbye," she said. She went to the door and opened it, throwing back her head. Her hair flashed brilliantly in the light. "Were your people Biblical? Gabriel is such a quaint name. I kept looking for the last trump when I went through your things."

"I refuse to fight with you," Gabriel said. "You're too beautiful."

She paused there. "Maybe there's hope for you, despite the musty archives!" She flashed a smile. "You're very nice, really. Stuffy but nice. Take some good advice, Gabriel?"

"I'm open-minded."

"Don't sail on that ship."

"That seems to be the consensus of opinion," Gabriel remarked, watching her sharply. "You're not first with the thought. I suppose you mean that after all, you and I could have good fun in Port of Spain and I could always get a plane for Rio when I had to? My charm, today, goes beyond bounds."

"Only a moment ago, you refused to fight," she said shrugging. "Goodbye." She

went out and closed the door quietly behind her.

Gabriel didn't like the finality of the clicking latch. He went to the door and opened it, but the hall was deserted and he could hear her going down the stairs. He closed the door and locked it, puzzled.

By midnight, Gabriel was sure that he would not sleep. It wasn't only that the darkness was unfriendly, his conscience bothered him. He pictured her again, standing by the door before she left, and he was sorry that he hadn't been nicer, for he couldn't get her out of his mind. He'd given her very little for her aid.

Nevertheless, something was wrong. He felt crowded. Outside, the cicadas noised metallically, and once he heard the voice of a hook-beaked toucan which brought home Letti Gaynor's screams vividly. At twelve-thirty, by his watch, the telephone rang and he sprang to it gratefully and turned on the light.

"Mijnheer Adams?"

"Yes," he said. "Is it you, Hans?"

"Ja," said van der Decken. He spoke in a surge of excitement. "Captain Klinkert asked me to call you up and tell you we were in. There has been trouble, *mijnheer,* lots of trouble. They wouldn't let us off the ship. That's why I'm so late."

"Where are you, in the lobby?"

"Ja, you want me to come right up?"

"Come ahead," said Gabriel. "What's wrong?"

"A terrible thing," van der Decken said hoarsely, "Mr. Cumstock is dead!"

"Dead?"

"Hung by the neck in his own closet. I'll come right up to see you."

Gabriel slowly and thoughtfully replaced the receiver on the hook and got out of bed to unlock the door. His face could have been chipped from stone.

CHAPTER IX

NO INSURANCE

HANS VAN DER DECKEN was enjoying himself. He would have been horrified if Gabriel had suggested it, for the steward was not aware of it himself. But despite the dark fires behind his eyes and the unsteadiness of his voice, despite the paleness of his usually pink skin, he was enjoying the circumstances. The simple fact was that the Dutchman was no longer bored. One landfall at least had been different.

"Sit down over there," Gabriel said, locking the door behind the steward. "You're shaking all over."

"Ja, mijnheer. But not all over. My hands only. I noticed it when I tried to light a cigarette. But we have had excitement, you missed it all by leaving the ship."

"I've had a mild share myself," Gabriel said, returning to the bedside.

Van der Decken lighted a cigarette and coughed on the smoke when he inhaled too hard. *"Wat is er?"*

"Never mind," Gabriel replied. "You tell me what happened to Cumstock. I'm going to get dressed while you talk. I can't sleep a wink anyway. I've been trying but it's no good. I've got too many things on my mind and none of them make sense. You tell me about Cumstock, Hans, and don't skip anything."

"Cumstock was a good man," said Van der Decken. *"Het spijt mij.* It was a very quick thing. I still do not understand it. I don't think Captain Klinkert does either."

"Tell me what happened," Gabriel said. "Never mind what you think. When did it happen?"

"When? Tonight, not six hours ago. Poor Cumstock, he's still warm!"

"It happened after you dropped anchor?"

"No, before that." Van der Decken crushed out his cigarette nervously. He had only puffed it twice. "We must have been forty miles or so west of the Dragon's Mouth, *mijnheer,* when it came time for Cumstock's watch, and he did not put in an appearance, *neen.*

"Captain Klinkert called me and told me to wake up Cumstock and tell him to hit the bridge. So I went to Cumstock's cabin and there was no answer."

"You went in."

"*Ja,* I went in, but still there was nothing. Maybe I was stupid, but if you don't see a man in his room, that is no reason to look for him in his closet, *is het?* So I reported to Captain Klinkert, that there was no Cumstock."

He took a breath. "Well then, Captain Klinkert said, 'He will be along. He is somewhere else and late.' But Cumstock did not show up.

"Captain Klinkert became impatient then, and angry. 'Come along, Hans,' he said to me, 'We find this lazybones!' But we could not find him and no one had seen him. Then Captain Klinkert got worried, and we went back to Cumstock's cabin.

"The only reason we opened the closet was to see if he had left his cap in there, which would have meant that he was not on deck."

GABRIEL ADAMS waited while van der Decken paused, seeing the whole thing again, as the expression on his face testified.

"It is a terrible thing to see a hanging man," van der Decken whispered. "We didn't expect it, anything like it. We opened the door. I let out a yell and the captain cried *'Hoe jammer'* and we both stepped back."

"How did he do it?"

"He was hanging there from a clothes hook," said the steward. "Cumstock was a little man, but even so, it's a wonder the hook held him. He'd taken his belt and tightened it around his neck and looped it over the hook. His tongue—"

"Never mind that," Gabriel hurriedly tied his tie and slipped on a jacket. "Just tell me this, Hans. You said it was a suicide. Are you sure it was? Did you find the slightest clue on the spot that might indicate it was a murder? Did Cumstock leave a farewell note?"

"Cumstock left nothing," van der Decken said evenly. "And there were lots of funny things I didn't like. I saw Cumstock after dinner when it was beginning to get dark and I said to him that we would be in at Port of Spain soon enough and would he like to go to a cinema with me? He said no.

"He apologized—he was a courteous man—and he said he had important business ashore, the minute he landed. If he planned to commit suicide, *mijnheer,* would he have said that? Wouldn't he have just said yes, he would go to a cinema? Why should he tell me a story if he was going to hang himself?"

Gabriel shrugged. "I don't know. That's not enough. You can't explain the function of the mind of a suicide."

"Well then," said van der Decken, "Captain Klinkert pointed to me that Cumstock's feet were touching the floor of the closet. 'My God, Hans,' the captain said, 'would you have the nerve to let yourself strangle when your feet were touching the ground like that and you only had to straighten your legs for air?' "

Gabriel stared at the steward, aghast. "Are you trying to tell me that Cumstock hung himself with his feet touching the floor? That's impossible."

"But he did."

"Impossible! No man could do it. He'd have to get up off the floor and kick a bucket or a stool. There's no man with the kind of iron nerve that would stop him from straightening his legs in his struggles. Good God, Hans, it—it couldn't be done—not possibly—not by a maniac. The instinct of self-preservation would—"

"*Ja,* that is what Captain Klinkert said. 'The instinct of self-preservation.' That is why he wirelessed the port authorities and asked for an investigation. He didn't say murder, but he didn't like suicide either."

"What did the port authorities say?"

"THEY'RE finished, that's why they let us off the boat. They gave a verdict of suicide. What else could they give? If some one else killed Cumstock, how was it done?"

"With the same belt by a strangler."

"But then he would have had to lift the corpse into the closet."

"You said yourself Cumstock was a

little man. He couldn't have weighed more than a hundred and twenty-five pounds or so."

"No one was with him, no one saw him after dinner, except me. I was the last one to see him alive."

"That isn't so," said Gabriel, "or else you'd be the strangler yourself. The truth of the matter is, Hans, that Mr. Cumstock was murdered because he was in possession of a secret. Time will tell if I'm right. I know for a fact that he sent a letter—air-mail to Port of Spain from Dominica. I have good reason to suspect that it wasn't a trivial letter, but an important communication. That being so, why didn't he wireless directly?"

"I don't know," said van der Decken. "Why didn't he?"

"The only reason I can think of is because he didn't want the radio officer to see what he was saying."

"Thimm!"

"Yes," Gabriel said coldly. "Thimm." He picked up the telephone and called down to the desk. "Would you please connect me with the home of Clements Leeds? I don't know where it is, and I don't know the number."

"I'll get it for you," the desk clerk said.

Presently, Gabriel could hear the operator ringing. There was a long wait and no one answered. Finally a voice said, "Hello, sah? Residence of Clements Leeds."

"Is Mr. Leeds home?"

"No, sah."

"Miss Merrill Leeds?"

"No, sah."

"Who is this?"

"John, sah, the house-boy."

"Thanks," Gabriel said shortly, and hung up. He called the desk again. "Monty—is that your name?"

"Yes, Mr. Adams."

"Has Miss Letti Gaynor checked out?"

"Yes, sir. Before midnight."

"Did she leave alone?" Gabriel asked.

"As a matter of fact, no," replied the desk clerk. "A gentleman called for her. An officer from one of the boats outside, I guess, for he was in uniform."

"What did he look like?"

"I really couldn't say, Mr. Adams. I see so many people—"

Gabriel thanked him. "I'm checking out in a few minutes," he said, and hung up. He looked at the steward. "I'm going out to the *Apeldoorn* tonight and go aboard."

"Ja, mijnheer. That was what I had in mind when I came up to the Queen's Park. I thought maybe you would want to go back on ship."

Gabriel nodded. "It's all very odd. There's something wrong, Hans, something terribly wrong. I wish I knew what it was. Thimm wanted me off the freighter. I'd swear to it on the Good Book.

"Letti Gaynor tried to have me off. Merrill Leeds told me I couldn't have my fish or even myself insured if I went aboard. What is it? The Cuban was safe enough, he only took passage to Santiago. But no one else made the trip, no passengers."

Gabriel's voice had grown hollow. "It's almost as if the *Apeldoorn* was destined for trouble."

CHAPTER X

THE DISAPPEARING MR. LEEDS

"TROUBLE?" van der Decken said. But that is crazy! Why should she have trouble? She is a fine boat!"

"She has sea cocks."

"But there is no sense to it, there is no sense to all this you have said. I don't understand it—I don't know these people you speak of. Who would profit if she sank? Only the Royal Dutch Lines. They'd collect her insurance, but it would be foolish to attempt that.

"The Lloyd's people are very clever and seldom fooled, and besides, the *Apeldoorn* is an A-1 ship. She makes money. It would be a loss, insurance or not, if she sank. Not only that, but I can't believe my company would do such a thing."

"Companies do strange things when they need money."

"I can't believe it, *mijnheer,* not such a story. It is preposterous. It would make Captain Klinkert accessory to a scuttling,

which is ridiculous." He pushed his cap back on his head. "It would make the whole crew—they would have to buy off the crew for silence—"

"Not if you all drowned."

"Gabriel, *goede hemel,* you are barking up the wrong tree, believe me."

"I know it, Hans, but I'm only probing, and something is wrong, you admit that?"

Van der Decken shrugged. "I admit it might be so. But after all, Cumstock could have taken his own life. He was a quiet man who minded his own business. How are we to know why he did it? He might have had reasons."

Gabriel sighed heavily. "There's one man knows the answer to Cumstock," he said glumly. "Clements Leeds. And I hope to heaven I can lay hands on him before we sail. You take my bag, Hans, and I'll carry the fish. We're going back to the boat."

He paid his bill downstairs, and called a cab and they left.

On the waterfront, at Marine Square, Gabriel had the driver take him and van der Decken to the building where the Atlantic Limited office was located. There was a pale light in the window of the office, which was on the second floor behind an ornate railing of a balcony. Elated, Gabriel told the steward to wait with the cab.

He himself tried the bell of the office but received no answer. He moved out into the street and called up to the lighted window, "Leeds! Mr. Leeds!"

Almost instantly, a policeman materialized in the shadows, looking trim and neat in his dark trousers, white-jacketed, and with a white pith-helmet on his head. "Here, here now," he cautioned, "what's this noise, sir?"

"Light up there," Gabriel said. "No one answers. I was calling—"

The policeman glanced up. "That's only the night light, sir, there's no one there."

"Oh," Gabriel said. He returned to the cab. "No one there, Hans. We might as well take the launch out." He paid the driver. Hans van der Decken joined him on the street, and they walked along Marine Square to the landing stage.

"*Mijnheer,* this man you called to—he is the one who knows what happened to Cumstock?"

"Yes," said Gabriel tiredly. "But I haven't even met him since I set foot on this island. Lord knows where he is now."

"What did you say his name was?"

"Leeds. Clements Leeds."

VAN DER DECKEN'S eyes narrowed and he tugged at his chin. "There was a man came out to the *Apeldoorn* tonight with the port authorities, named Leeds."

"Are you sure?" Gabriel cried, electrified.

"*Neen,* I am not sure, but it sounded—"

"What happened to him? Did he leave the ship with the port authorities?"

Van der Decken shook his head. "No, he stayed and talked with Captain Klinkert for a long while, and then I came ashore on leave with the others myself."

Gabriel tried to repress his uneasiness. "Who came ashore in your boat—did Steuber and Thimm come, leaving Leeds behind?"

The big Dutchman said:

"Steuber came ashore, but not Thimm. Captain Klinkert wanted Thimm aboard ship."

"All right," Gabriel said. They had reached the *landing plaats.* "Let's go out. There's the launch."

They went out across the black waters, for there was no moonlight and the stars did not have the power to show the way.

Though the sea may be beautiful by day, by night it is tangibly black and awesome. With little freeboard, Gabriel could have thrust his hand over into the phosphorescence of the wake.

He had always found water overwhelming at night. Swimming for a lark in such black water once had given him the scare of his life, for his imagination conjured horrid things, and black water had the feel of slime.

Across the gulf, none of her bulk visible, they identified the *Apeldoorn* by her anchor light on which they made their bearing. At her beam, presently, they ascended the

boarding ladder to her decks. Mr. Swanson, fourth officer, checked them in.

"May I see the captain?"

"Neen, mijnheer. Captain Klinkert has retired with orders not to be disturbed. He has had an exhausting night. In the morning?"

Gabriel said, "It's important, Mr. Swanson."

"Surely it can wait, Mijnheer Adams. I don't wish to be rude, but the captain—"

Gabriel shrugged. "All right, it can wait. Perhaps you can tell me yourself. Was there a man named Clements Leeds aboard?"

"The man with Captain Klinkert? Was his name Leeds?"

"I'm asking you."

"I don't know," said Mr. Swanson. "There was a man with the captain, short and heavy, with gray hair and glasses, but he is gone now."

"He went ashore?"

"Ja, he went ashore some time ago."

"You saw him go?"

"Ja, he went. I saw him go. I signaled for the launch to come out and get him."

Gabriel and van der Decken exchanged glances. Gabriel murmured, "I'll say goodnight to you both. It's nice to be back aboard again. I always feel that way with the *Apeldoorn.* No matter how crazy things seem ashore, there's a permanence about this gray lady that reaches into a man's heart."

He paused for a moment. "I hope it lasts." He turned and went along the deck and then disappeared amidships as he went below, his *Paleozoic* trophy beneath his arm.

The old captain waggled his finger under the Britisher's nose—it was useless

TO GABRIEL ADAMS, mild-mannered young scientist, there is something decidedly wrong about the S.S. *Apeldoorn*, the Dutch freighter on which he has made seven previous trips to Rio. This trip, for instance, both the radio man and the chief officer are missing, victims of the sort of injuries that, to Adams, suggest that they have been beaten up. And Adams is the only passenger aboard, which is more than odd. Adding that to the two men who have replaced the missing officers—sour-faced THIMM and taciturn STEUBER—Gabe has a puzzle that isn't to his liking.

Gabe has to leave the ship at Willemstad to collect a specimen for the Federal Museum—a fish of a species thought to have been extinct for fifty million years. Waiting at Port of Spain to rejoin the *Apeldoorn*, Gabe meets one LETTI GAYNOR, who tells him not one but several different lies to explain why she wants him to change from the *Apeldoorn* to her cruise-ship for the completion of his trip to Rio.

MISS GAYNOR goes so far as an attempt to blackmail Gabe by coming to his room at night very sketchily clad. This try is blocked by lovely MERRILL LEEDS, who comes sauntering into the room and gets rid of Letti in no time at all.

Merrill tells Gabe that if he sails on board the *Apeldoorn*, her father, who is the Lloyds' man at Port of Spain, will insure neither him nor his precious *ganoid isophilis*. Gabriel takes this to mean that she has definite knowledge that something is due to go very wrong aboard the *Apeldoorn*. He demands to know from whom she has this information. She has done no more

than to tell him the name: SECOND-OFFICER CUMSTOCK, when Gabriel gets the word from his crony VAN DER DECKEN, steward on the *Apeldoorn,* that Cumstock has been found hanged in his stateroom.

The port authorities call it suicide, but van der Decken astutely points out that few men will attempt to kill themselves by hanging from a position in which their feet can touch the floor.

Merrill's father has been aboard the *Apeldoorn,* but Gabe can find no one who has seen him within the past two hours.

In spite of all the overt violence and undercover mystery, Gabe finds a strange feeling of peace within him as he settles down on the *Apeldoorn.* "Everything," he muses, "seems so calm here. I only hope it lasts. . . ."

CHAPTER X

BEHOLD THE BRIDEGROOM

ALL things considered, Gabriel Adams slept soundly, and he was annoyed with himself that he had. Sentries on watch, he felt, should do no more than drowse lightly. He had been restless enough in his bed at the Queen's Park Inn, but in his berth aboard ship, he had popped off instantly.

When he awoke, not long after dawn, he felt refreshed, his head clear. His cabin was on the ship's portside facing the harbor, and he looked across the gulf at the buildings which were beginning to evolve out of the gray mist.

The sun was still invisible, hidden behind the dark mountains behind Port of Spain, but the backlighting made a splendid effect. The gulf water looked pale green in the dawn-light; and the day smelled fresh and salty.

Suddenly Gabe came in possession of a fact that had lurked half concealed in his brain since the moment he had opened his eyes: he had not awakened naturally. Something had roused him. This was confirmed by a tapping on his door the next instant. He climbed out of his berth and unlocked the door.

"Good morning, *mijnheer,*" van der Decken said cheerfully. "Will you have coffee?"

"Don't you sleep at all?" Gabriel said.

Van der Decken said, "I have news, but first I bring you coffee." His pleasant, cheerful face carried no reflection of the ugly fact that violence and death had come aboard last night.

"All right," Gabe said, frowning.

The steward was back in five minutes with a tray. Steaming coffee in a white china pot. Fruit that looked scrubbed and dewy.

Gabriel closed the door. "What's the news?"

"We have six passengers," van der Decken whispered. "They boarded ten minutes ago. Five men and a woman. Passage for Rio. All of them. They missed the boat in New York and flew down to catch it." Judging by the steward's manner, this happened all the time.

"Who are they?" Gabriel snorted. "That's preposterous."

"I checked their names on the list. They're German."

"What about Leeds?"

The steward's blandness relaxed into a slight frown. "He left the ship sometime last night," said van der Decken. "I got that from the captain himself." The frown deepened. "There *is* something strange about all this, Gabriel. Captain Klinkert is cross as a *tijger* and he takes a man's head off when he is spoken to. He is worried. I am worried too. You were right. All of this is strange."

"When do we sail?"

"At eight we weigh anchor."

"It's a fact that all cabins are paid for? No one else could take passage, even with empty rooms?"

"*Ja.*" He shrugged. "*Ik versta het niet.*"

"You're not alone there. I don't understand it either." Gabriel sipped his coffee and lighted a cigarette. "Sometimes I wonder why I bother my pretty head about any of it. I don't see how it concerns me at all. But I seem to get pulled in to things by the heels. It's a nuisance. I don't like it.

"Some one is playing for keeps. I'd hate to commit suicide with my feet on the ground. The way poor Cumstock did.

That would be annoying. Also, I'd hate to have a boat sink under my feet. That would be uncomfortable."

"Whatever it's all about, you're wrong on that, *mijnheer*. This boat won't sink. She's a fine boat."

"Cumstock was a fine man," Gabriel said laconically. "Somebody opened his sea cocks just the same. If I were smart, I'd stay in Port of Spain for two weeks and then fly to Rio."

Van der Decken looked amused. "*Neen*, you don't leave the ship. You have Dutch blood, *mijnheer*, with your stubborn jaw."

"God save the mark," Gabriel groaned. "That's all we would need now—a philosophical steward. You'd better get out of here."

"*Ja*. I will see you on deck later."

GABRIEL returned to his bed and finished his coffee as the sun, crawling over the distant mountains, burned the cabin orange.

The thought occurred to him that if Clements Leeds had held the answer to Cumstock's death in the letter from Dominica, wouldn't the insurance-agent have made use of his information, the previous night, when he visited the ship with the authorities?

If there had really been foul play with the defunct second-officer, would Leeds have departed so gracefully and quietly? Gabriel wondered if he weren't making an ass of himself with his suspicions.

On the other hand, he could not persuade himself that the missing Deechen and the missing Drakensberg had suffered merely casual accidents which prevented their sailing with the ship from New York.

He had joked with van der Decken about it in Wilhelmstad but it was no longer a joking matter. It made good sense. If you were going to sink a ship, the two important posts to cover would be those of chief officer and radio officer. The former could assume control of the ship the instant anything happened to the captain, and the latter could prevent any radio messages, which might be allergic to the general scheme, from being transmitted.

Gabriel shaved and dressed, donning his most violent sport-jacket in an attempt to halt the fidgetings of his stream of consciousness. The green and brown pattern of the jacket required in its wearer the bland *sangfroid* of a complete extrovert.

He ate breakfast in the dining room, aft, where it was located above the ship's rudder and screw. He did not eat alone, either, for two of the new passengers were sharing a table.

He examined them in a falsely perfunctory manner; actually he eyed them quite sharply. They were both young, neither over twenty-five; one brown-haired, one blond; both big. They glanced at him occasionally and he could sense that they were uneasy. They talked in low voices in German, sometimes mixed with Spanish. They said nothing of consequence in Spanish. Gabe couldn't tell what they were saying in German.

At seven-thirty, Gabriel heard a commotion on the upper deck, and went up to investigate.

He found a company of British Marines in a big launch at the boarding ladder, and the commanding officer coming up. The Marines carried rifles with fixed bayonets which picked up fire from the violent morning sun.

Captain Klinkert had seen them from the bridge and was on his way down while the chief-officer, Steuber, shook hands with the Marine captain, and welcomed him aboard.

Gabriel had not previously had the opportunity to observe the chief-officer closely. He had caught only one glimpse of Steuber when the *Apeldoorn* was threading her route through the Bahamas southward, and he had not seen the mate again. Steuber was of medium height; he was very wiry, with a white scar making a ragged cleft in his chin. He said to the Marine commander: "May I help you, sir?"

"I'm Captain Lainsley," the Marine commander said. "Are you the first offi-

cer? I wish to see Captain Klinkert at once."

"I will get him, sir," Steuber said smartly, touching his cap. He went down the deck.

Gabriel sauntered over to Captain Lainsley and said hello and casually asked what was the matter. The commander smiled pleasantly but coldly and did things with heavy red eyebrows which indicated plainly that Gabriel should mind his own business. The point was well taken and Gabe asked no more questions. His status as an amiable snooper had clearly defined limits.

Steuber did not go far, for Captain Klinkert was already on the way, and Gabriel could see that Klinkert's ordinarily merry face was red and lined and angry.

HE TOOK short quick steps, swinging his arms in a long arc and he halted before Lainsley, panting a little and swelling up like a blowfish to demand, *Ja, Majnheer Kapitein, wat is er?"*

"English, please," Captain Lainsley said sharply. "I am going to search your ship, Captain, with your permission."

"Neen," said Captain Klinkert, barking like a seal. "You do not have my permission. Port authorities were all over this ship like rats last night. I clear at eight bells and I will not be detained. This is a neutral ship, *Kapitein,* not the vessel of a belligerent."

"I must insist," said the Englishman, unimpressed.

"For what cause? I carry mails for neutral countries in South America. There is no mail aboard for any belligerent. That has all been checked by your customs here."

"I wish to examine your passengers, Captain Klinkert, and I'll appreciate your co-operation. I am in possession of information which leads me to believe you have German seamen aboard."

"That is not true."

Lainsley continued coolly:

"Two of them, Steinmetz and Groner are traveling with forged passports. They came from Bahia. We have checked, and Bahia has no record of their visas."

"I refuse, *Kapitein,"* said Captain Klinkert. "It is my right to protest your detaining my ship. I will resist."

Captain Lainsley blew a whistle, and the armed Marines boarded the *Apeldoorn* with bayonets fixed. There was no resistance. Captain Klinkert nodded brusquely and remarked that the situation was beyond him.

Gabriel could see that his objections had been just a formality, calculated as basis for a subsequent official protest from the Dutch.

The Marines disappeared below decks under the guidance of Mr. Steuber whom Klinkert assigned to them, and the affair was ended.

Captain Klinkert returned to the bridge, still angry, and did not even favor Gabriel with a reply when Gabriel said good morning to him.

At the railing, Gabriel watched a small launch coming out to the *Apeldoorn* across the waters of the gulf. As he watched, he felt some one join him, and saw it was the steward.

"The captain is angry," van der Decken said.

"Well, after all, there's a war on," Gabriel said. "They have to do what they think best."

"Ja, but Captain Klinkert has had enough trouble."

Gabriel nodded. "Is that launch coming here?"

Van der Decken looked across the waters. "I guess so, *mijnheer.* There is no other ship out on these roads, except the big Grace liner, and you can see her to the north. Maybe this is more trouble, *ja?"* Having permitted himself to admit that something queer was going on, the steward eagerly awaited developments. He peered happily across the gulf.

But the launch was still far enough away so that they could not see who was aboard, even though they could make out that there were only two figures in the small boat.

THE Marines and Captain Lainsley reappeared on deck with two young men in tow. Captain Klinkert came thudding up again, and broke into a heated argument with Lainsley. Gabe was too far away to make out what they said, but it was plain that the Dutchman eventually went down in defeat, his flags of protest still flying.

Then the Marines deserted the *Apeldoorn* for their tender, taking the two men with them. Gabriel had not seen these men before; they were definitely not the two who had been in the dining room. Captain Lainsley followed his men and the tender cast off and headed back to Port of Spain.

"I'll find out what happened," van der Decken promised. "I'll be back, *mijnheer.*"

Gabriel watched the little white launch as it came closer. The figure in the stern looked very familiar. A woman, hatless, the morning breeze curling her golden hair. He couldn't believe it. But in an instant, there was no room for doubt and he leaned over the rail and shouted, "Merrill! Merrill!"

She looked up sharply at the sound of her name. She waved at him, called once, voice firm: "Gabriel—wait—"

He waved and grinned back at her. Where, after all, could he go—even if he wanted to desert? He ran to the boarding ladder and went down to help her from the launch, which was rolling in its own wake. Merrill Leeds came across with easy grace. The launch helmsman tossed her two bags on the grating, then waved and cast off and turned back for the shore.

Gabriel said, astonished, "You mean you're—"

Her mouth was tight, but she kissed nim, not too casually, then put her cheek against his briefly. "I'm your wife," she whispered sharply. "Please play it that way. Please."

Gabe goggled at her helplessly, murmured: "Sure. What's a wife more or less?"

"Thanks," she said swiftly, and gripped his arm hard.

CHAPTER XI

STEUBER IS SUBTLE

"COME up on deck," he said, carrying her bags, "and watch yourself. That's Steuber, the chief, and from the murderous look in his eyes, I'd say we were in for trouble." Bitterly he wished that things would stop happening to him without even asking his leave. What, for instance, was Merrill up to? One thing—he was in the mood to fox Steuber.

On deck Mr. Steuber snapped, "I'm sorry, Mr. Adams, but there is no time for visitors. We are clearing!"

"I'm not a visitor," Merrill said coolly. She smiled at him. "I'm sailing with you." She took Gabe's arm again and clung to it like a leech.

Gabriel was stunned. He managed to nod, grinning. It was a horrible grin, he knew, because he did not feel like grinning at all.

Her smile fell on barren ground. Steuber looked at her hard, with just the touch of a sneer and said sharply, "You will remain here while I signal a launch. You cannot sail on this ship, miss. There are no more cabins. You must have learned this ashore."

"I learned nothing of the kind," Merrill replied, frowning. "And I don't like your tone. Gabriel—"

"Take it easy, Steuber," Gabriel said evenly. "I don't like your tone either." Steuber's tone was just one of the many delightful features of the situation Gabe did not like, but it was the only one he could get at.

"I apologize for my tone," Steuber said crisply. "But we have had a good deal of trouble in this port, Mr. Adams, as you have seen for yourself, and I'm sure Captain Klinkert will not tolerate any more nonsense which detains the ship. The *Apeldoorn* runs on schedule and we lose money when these delays—"

Captain Klinkert himself came along the deck, puffing like a beached porpoise. But he did not look nearly so thunderous as before, Gabriel noted. The presence of a

woman cramped his honest rage. He pulled at his mustache and bowed slightly to Merrill and said, *"Hoezee,* Mr. Steuber. Now what is all this?"

Steuber's eyes were hostile. His blunt-jawed face was ashy and he looked shaken. His lips were white. "The young lady boarded without permission, Captain, and insists on sailing without reservations. She dismissed her launch, and it's gone too far to be recalled."

Captain Klinkert looked grim. "Is this so, *juf-vrouw?* If it is, you are in trouble. I assure you! What is all this, Gabriel?"

Gabriel wished he knew, but he began to extemporize with some degree of glibness.

"It's very simple," Gabriel said, his voice a trifle hoarse. "I'd tell you if I could get a word in edgewise! I haven't had a chance with Steuber howling for blood. You'd think I was a deckhand on this ship instead of a passenger." Gabriel was beginning to warm up to his theme of righteous indignation. What he'd needed all morning, he realized, was a chance to blow his top about something. And this certainly was a lulu.

"Gently, gently," Captain Klinkert replied, taken aback by Gabriel's obviously heartfelt anger. "Mr. Steuber was only doing his duty. If we are to clear—there have been so many interruptions—perhaps our nerves are all on edge, what with poor Cumstock, and those damn Marines, *ja!* Now tell me about the lady. Who is she and in the name of reason why does she wish to sail to Rio on this—this floating madhouse!"

"She happens to be my wife," Gabriel said. He swallowed, and glared around fiercely, ready to take a poke at the first man, woman, or child who challenged the authenticity of his lie.

"Your *vrouw,* Gabriel?" Captain Klinkert roared, astonished. His eyes sparkled, and then he laughed thunderously and slapped his leg. "Why, you young *ezel!* So you took me at my word, *neen?"*

"Your word?" Merrill said, smiling at him. She turned to Gabe. "Oh darling, and all the time I thought it was money. Well, thanks, Captain. It's taken me two years of hard work to make him say yes."

The chief officer's face was brittle. A request to examine the marriage certificate trembled on his lips, but he didn't dare go quite that far. So soon. In these affairs one must be patient, orderly. "May I see your passport, madam?"

"Don't be a fool, Mr. Steuber," Captain Klinkert said instantly. "The passport of Mijnheer Adams covers them both."

"With a marriage certificate," Steuber said. "Without it—" He regarded them triumphantly, pleased with the subtlety of his maneuver. Captain Klinkert brushed him aside with characteristic abruptness.

"You may tell the steward to take Mevrouw Adams' bags to her cabin," Captain Klinkert said.

"Yes, sir," Steuber said, his eyes burning. "I beg your pardon, madam. No insult was intended. It is only that regulations—"

"We know about regulations," Gabriel said.

"Yes, sir," Steuber said, and left them.

Gabriel watched the chief officer's back until it had disappeared amidships into a companionway, and wondered remotely what had shaken him so hard.

"He was very blunt," Merrill said to Captain Klinkert, turning on her charm, "but perhaps it might be better if there were no misunderstandings. Let's clear it up once and for all. . . ."

She patted Gabriel's cheek. "It only goes to show that you can keep a secret too long, darling. If you had broken it to them gradually, they wouldn't have been so shocked. I've the marriage certificate right here, Captain, if you wish to see it."

She unfolded it and handed it to Klinkert who glanced at it politely and instantly returned it to her. Gabriel's jaw dropped to a new low. He felt as if Joe Louis had just hit him in the stomach. Luckily Klinkert didn't notice.

"Wel!" he said with rasping cheerful-

ness. "This is fine, eh? Only last week I was telling this young herring-lover that he was a fool to consort with *menhaden* instead of angels, and here in a flash, he takes the wind out of my sails!

"I think it is wonderful, *mevrouw,* and I hope you make a human being out of him. I also hope you do not spoil his rummy game!" He chuckled and nicked her under the chin.

"*Ja,* a pretty *echgenoote.* If I had trimmed my mustache, I would kiss the bride! Long life and happiness and many children to you both." He peered at her. "See, Gabriel, a good woman, who does not blush when I am vulgar!"

"You are, on the contrary," replied Merrill, throwing her head back, "one of the nicest captains I've ever met, and not half so disagreeable as you look."

The left-handed compliment won Klinkert completely. He roared with solid laughter, and Gabriel, anxious and puzzled, nevertheless grinned at her cleverness in handling the Dutchman. The grin sickened when he remembered that she was in a practically ideal spot for charming *him* around, too.

CHAPTER XII

HONEYMOONERS SHOULDN'T TALK ABOUT MURDER

THERE were many things, clamoring for his attention, in Gabriel Adams' mind, which was ordinarily a very orderly thing. Now conclusions, guesses and questions had strewn themselves about so completely, that he was reduced to a numb indignation.

He and Merrill did not go below for some time; avoiding by tacit agreement the intimacy of his cabin. The *Apeldoorn* had weighed anchor and was under way. The familiar hum of the turbine, and the faint, comfortable tremble of the turning screw came alive; and at the aft masthead, the red, white and blue Dutch flag fluttered in the wind which rose with their movement toward the Bocas del Dragon.

Gabriel felt small relief that they were actually under way, but he could not shake off a feeling of dread that crowded him against a hard blank wall.

Merrill Leeds had thrust her arm through his as they hung on the port rail and watched the city of Port of Spain recede as they neared the great red and gray stone cliffs of the strait where terns and sea birds, rested on the guana-weighted ledges above the black caves.

Her face was drawn and now and then her chin shook a little. Gabriel squeezed her hand and put his head close to hers and murmured, "Merrill—I think I'm going to break your neck. Lovely morning, isn't it, dear."

"Heavenly. We can't talk here," she said, her voice unsteady.

"Be careful, Gabriel, do be careful. See all those birds!"

"Nasty, honking brutes. I'll be careful," he said. "But I want to know where I stand. I mean, of course, don't take me into your confidence unless you feel like it. People have been pushing me around for days now."

She seemed not to have heard him as she watched the shoreline come closer as they reached the strait and started through the islands of the Bocas del Dra[illegible].

Gabriel continued soberly, "Listen, Merrill. This thing is going to be complicated. It's going to be damned complicated. And when we try to simplify it, that eel Steuber will complicate it again."

"Please be careful," she said.

"You don't know him," Gabriel said. "Matter of fact, I don't know him either. I thought Thimm was bad enough. But Thimm is an amateur. Take my word for it, Steuber is no ordinary officer."

Merrill glanced at him sharply. "Why do you say that?"

"He's used to being obeyed," Gabriel said. "Couldn't you feel that? Where he comes from, he's been handing out discipline, not taking it. He could've cut our hearts out for making him down-dog before Captain Klinkert. He'll make a very bad enemy, but then, there's no such thing as a good enemy."

"I'm sorry, Gabriel," Merrill Leeds murmured. "I'm afraid I've got you in a mess."

"You exaggerate. Of course we'll probably all be killed but let's not be alarmists."

"I had to take the chance," she said. "I left it to you when I came aboard. I thought if you didn't want any part of it you'd tell them I was a liar."

"How could I? Fine rat I'd have been."

His eyes fell to her left hand, and he stared at it. There was an exquisitely thin-banded platinum wedding ring on the third finger. Gabriel gasped, fingering it.

"That's ours," she said. "It was my mother's."

"Of course. Probably even have rice in your hair. How was I at the wedding? I thought I did the *I dos* with fine resonance. . . . You thought of everything, didn't you?"

"I hope I did—I don't know—"

"That trick certificate— You put Machiavelli to shame."

THE open sea lay before the *Apeldoorn's* bow and the ship began to feel its motion. She began a slow, rhythmic pitching.

Gabriel felt eyes on his back and glanced aft. Mr. Steuber was on the port wing-tip of the bridge and looked away instantly. Gabriel said, "That guy doesn't quite believe it."

"Who doesn't?" asked Merrill without looking.

"Our friend with the Cassius face and the eyes of a prophet."

"Of a Soucouyan, you mean."

Gabriel laughed. "What's that, a Trinidad *jumbie?*"

"Yes. Soucouyans take off their skin between midnight and dawn and become vengeful balls of fire, entering rooms through keyholes and sucking blood from the hearts of their victims."

"The analogy is well-drawn," Gabriel said. "Mr. Steuber may yet discard his present skin and show us who he really is. And the antidote?"

"Grains of rice sprinkled around the victim. The Soucouyan must pick up every grain before he can reach the victim, and by then, dawn may have come and it will be too late."

"In other words, red herrings should be lavishly sprinkled. You know, there's good sense in most of these darkie superstitions, and this one hits home with uncommon logic. And what is dawn to be in our case —Rio?"

"Bahia will do nicely."

Gabriel began to understand. "It's getting windy," he said. "Let's go below?" His voice was hard. "I want to know about this."

"Yes." She looked tired. "Let's go down."

"Happy is the bride, my dear. You look as if you were contemplating divorce. Or race suicide."

"I'm sorry. I'll do better."

THEY went down to Gabriel's cabin. He wondered what the devil Hans van der Decken was thinking. He could almost picture the steward's perplexity from the indecisive way in which Merrill's bags had been placed inside the door, almost tentatively, as if they really couldn't remain there.

Have to tell Hans, Gabriel thought; have to tell some one. Things were going to be amazingly difficult. He wondered if Merrill realized what she had let them both in for, and now that he fully realized himself, he began to lose heart.

There were, after all, too many details to be considered. It was easy to pretend a marriage on the bright sunlit deck of a boat, or even in a hotel room before a screaming young woman. It was easy when you had witnesses to impress, but it was not easy at all when there was no one but yourselves.

That was the catch, the working of the deception in his cabin.

Inside, Gabriel locked the door, led her through the sitting room into the bedroom. He had the largest accommodations on the boat, and the largest could have been

dropped into a third-class tourist cabin on a first-class liner.

"Sit down," he said. "Have a cigarette and relax. If you want to cry, go ahead, but do it quietly or they'll think I'm beating you already." He frowned at her. "You feel pretty much gone, don't you?"

"I don't know," she said. Her voice was firmer. "I don't feel like crying. That's an odd thing about me. I've never felt like crying in a crisis. I wait until it's all over; then I howl. Dad always said it wasn't womanly of me."

"The cad. Why I never met anyone so completely feminine. The shy way you bustled up that ladder and flung yourself at my neck—"

"Beast!"

Gabriel patted her hand and gave her a cigarette. Lighting it, he said, "This isn't getting us anywhere. Do you realize how much you've bitten off? I shudder to think of it.

"In the first place, not knowing me, you took an awful chance. I'm in a wonderful position to take advantage of you. All right, I know I'm a curly lamb and look like one, but the chance was there. This wedding ring business was good, and so was that marriage certificate—how did you swing that?"

"It's forged."

"But where did you get it? Is it real?"

"Oh yes, it's real. I got it from Mr. Buxley, who is a barrister and a friend of ours."

"Good enough. That put you on the boat. How did you expect to keep up the pretense of marriage? I mean, it's almost out of the question, Merrill."

"I couldn't get passage," Merrill said, smoking. "They told me that all cabins were booked. I was honestly desperate, Gabriel. I had to get aboard. I was sure after I got aboard, they could put me up some place. So I really used the wedding to stay here until it was too late for them to put me off, y'know."

"It's too late now. So what?"

She looked unsure of herself. "I don't know. I've a passport all right. I thought I'd make a clean breast to the captain and—well—find a cabin somehow. Surely some one cancelled."

Gabriel said, "You don't get it. Most of the cabins on this ship are unoccupied. But they've been paid for. It sounds crazy and it is crazy, almost. And then again, it's quite sane.

"Someone buys up the cabins and keeps people off this boat. . . . But you can't make yourself known on your own passport. That's out of the question, too. First place, it puts me in a spot. Captain Klinkert would never trust me again. Second place, it is dangerous. Damned dangerous."

Merrill nodded. She was cooler. "I'm beginning to see that."

"I take it your father is interested in this boat."

"Yes, that's right."

CHAPTER XIII

THE GAY CONSPIRATOR

HE EYED her sharply. "I've a strong hunch that you've helped your father in the past and that you're helping him now. It's all mixed up in the business of marine insurance, isn't it?" You don't have to answer my questions if you don't want to."

Merrill smiled at him. "You're a very nice man. I'll be honest with you. My dad isn't aboard this ship. He came off her last night safely enough. He's en route to Bahia by now via Pan American. He'll be there when we arrive."

Gabriel was completely mystified. His face showed it. He closed his mouth only when a boldly exploring fly reminded him it was agape.

"You see, the ship was to be sunk. Dad didn't and doesn't know where. He can prevent everything by reaching Bahia ahead of it."

"How?"

"I can't tell you now, but he can."

"And he stuck you aboard to prevent a scuttling en route? That's very nice." Gabriel was annoyed. "How he must love

his daughter. For two pins I'd scuttle you myself."

"Father despises me," she said, looking amused. Her voice was dry. "I have, well, rather a lot of money and dear old Dad wants to lay his hands on it. Permanently. This is a means to an end. He used to beat me. Now what do we do for a second-act curtain?"

"Cut it out," Gabriel said. Her assurance had returned and she was laughing at him. "I still don't think it was smart."

"Perhaps not, but you don't know the technique of scuttling. Odd thing, Gabriel, but one thing scuttlers like is privacy. No passengers and a trustworthy skeleton crew. No witnesses for Lloyds if it came to a suit and they refused to pay damages. Scuttling is no longer a 'peril of the sea.' What happens to this ship will have to be, supposedly, something else. Explosion. A far-fetched mine from across the ocean."

"I still don't see—"

"It's just that ships aren't scuttled in these waters with American citizens aboard, Gabriel. They'll wait."

Gabriel shuddered. "Why?"

"Your American Navy would be on the way from Guantanamo at once, to investigate such an action."

"How would they know?"

"Because I am to wireless Mr. Buxley every day, and if he doesn't hear from me, he'll get in touch with Dad. And then you'd see things fly.

"Besides, there would be too much to lose," she went on. "There's no crime in scuttling. You can sink all the ships you want, if they belong to you or if you are authorized to do so. Just so you don't try to collect money afterward from insurance. Murder is much too hazardous."

GABRIEL was silent for a moment. He found his pipe and began to suck on it, although the polished bowl was empty. Then he said, "But you're not American. Your British."

"Yes—but I'm your wife. And I'm here to wireless. Who else would have?"

"I see. It's an excellent check, I admit. But if Steuber found a lonely spot . . ."

"He isn't going to find a lonely spot."

"Why not?"

Merrill stared out the open port at the sea. "There are a lot of ships on this ocean, y'know. And quite by accident, we're going to keep meeting some of them all the way to Bahia."

She turned to him. "A ship doesn't plunge to the bottom when you open her cocks. She takes a long time, and so many scuttlers have had the bad luck to see their ships remain afloat when they should have been gone. There's a famous case—the *Ioanna*—in 1921."

"What happened?"

"She was supposed to have struck a mine. She was abandoned. Her master said she sank at three-thirty in the morning. At the trial, it developed that she had remained afloat—sinking all the time—for thirteen hours; and pictures of her sinking were taken the next day by a passing ship who came upon her.

"The *Ioanna* wanted privacy, and if she had had it, Lloyds might have been bilked. As it was . . ." She smiled and shrugged. "Mr. Steuber won't have empty ocean to try the same trick"

"I'll be damned," said Gabriel. "You mean your father actually will divert ships to us by radio to keep Steuber on his toes?"

"Definitely."

"Well, you live and learn." He stared at her. "But what about you and me? We haven't solved that. You can't show your passport, Merrill. Steuber knows your father now, and the name Leeds isn't common. If he knew you were aboard—and why—he might be difficult."

"I hadn't considered that, but you're right."

"There wouldn't be much point in his going to Bahia if he could see the handwriting on the wall and know that he wouldn't be leaving Bahia. That's the general idea, isn't it?"

"Yes," Merrill said.

"How does your father plan to swing that little trick?"

"I don't know, and it's none of my business. I'm only here to safeguard the *Apeldoorn* by sending a harmless radio message every day. The day that message is missed by Mr. Buxley, Dad will divert some one to our vicinity quicker than you can say boo."

"Never say it myself." He grinned. "You seem to have sublime confidence in the scheme. It's merely your neck, after all, if something goes phooey."

"I have," she said, smiling. "We worked it before. Not me personally. But Dad and an operative. It went very nicely. No floating corpses. No casualties. No blows."

Gabriel did not return the smile. "My opinion doesn't mean anything, I know, but either you've got the nerve of a barracuda or a really touching faith in the might of right. I think you ought to have your head examined for coming aboard this ship to send a wireless every day, and I think your father . . . Oh well, let's not fight."

"GOOD," Merrill said. "You're reforming. But seriously, what will I do? A puritanical soul like yourself would find any mutual arrangement in this cabin unbearable. Can you suggest anything else?"

"I could jump overboard, of course," Gabriel said tartly. "I don't suppose there's any reason why you couldn't bunk in the bedroom. I'll take the living-room here. The sofa is sound and almost comfortable. I could stand it."

"You're making a clandestine situation sound awfully dull," she said. She laughed.

"I didn't mean to make it sound dull. Only decent," Gabriel replied. "After all, Merrill, it might be different if we were in love, but we're not. You did me a favor; I'm ready to do you one. It's a high-toned arrangement and wholly moral, and with a minimum of good sense and co-operation, I don't see any reason why we can't both have respective and strict privacy, once within the cabin. After all, there isn't any real reason why I should have a cabin to myself just because I paid for one. Self-sacrifice is the keynote of the day."

"I see," Merrill said. She looked mildly annoyed. "You're quite right. A moral arrangement. Outside we act like honeymooners; inside I'll have no charm whatsoever. I don't suppose I even need bother to lock myself in. Who'd smash down doors to make love to *me?*"

"I didn't say that."

"But that's the idea."

"Yes," he growled, bedeviled and sore.

"All right," Merrill said icily. "I'm sure if you can stand it, I'll manage."

Gabriel had the impression she had thrust out a feeler for a really rousing quarrel. He ignored it and said, "It's time for lunch. Let's eat. I haven't finished my questions. There are still things I want to know."

"Oh, of course!" Merrill said, taking that for granted. "I never saw such a curious man. I'll change into something else. I won't take a minute."

She took half an hour and he got his first taste of the marital pause that enrages; but he bore up in the interim apathetically, glancing at his watch now and then. It was all very well for her to have such an airy opinion of the possibility of murder. He did not feel so blithe about it himself. Capital offense or not, as compared with the nefarious business of scuttling a ship, the fact remained that Mr. Cumstock had hung by the neck until he was dead.

CHAPTER XIV

SAFETY TO BAHIA

BY MID-AFTERNOON, the *Apeldoorn* had left Galina Point and was headed east south-east in the general direction of Africa. She began her sweeping circle of the South American Guianas and the northeastern coastline of Brazil, her compass course drawn on a point off Cape San Roque north of Pernambuco.

Gabriel wondered whether it was mere coincidence that a tramp sugar-freighter, outward bound, appeared on the horizon ahead of them as they overtook her. Surely Clements Leeds had not contacted that old

wallowing hulk with her rusty sides, for she could not have carried wireless. But when they neared her, he saw her antennae, and wondered again.

She had been suspiciously slow until they neared, and then she picked up speed. She lost the race, of course, for the *Apeldoorn* cruised at fourteen knots.

Even so, the tramp managed to hang in their wake all afternoon, losing them finally in the infinity of darkness which dropped down. . . .

The afternoon of the following day, Gabriel and Merrill lounged on the boat deck in steamer chairs, soaking up the sun. The trades blew gustily and there were long roiled graybacks as the Guianas fell away and left them in the open; the *Apeldoorn* took up a gentle rolling, for the wind and the seas were on her beam.

At four o'clock, van der Decken brought them tea.

The steward was uneasy and nonplussed. He presented Merrill with tea so gingerly as to be comical. Gabriel had to smile, for the steward matched the manner with which a nervous woman would handle an adder. Hans looked very embarrassed and distraught, the wind whipping his blond hair askew over his ears. His face was redder.

"There was a message for you, *mijnheer,*" he said when Gabriel refused a cup. He thrust an envelope at Gabriel and vanished with an awkward smile.

"Is that the van der Decken you spoke of?" Merrill Leeds asked. "I don't think he likes me."

"You scare him," Gabriel said.

He ripped open the envelope and pulled out a letter penned scrupulously in van der Decken's adolescent writing. He read quickly, "Mijnheer Adams, I have been trying to have a word with you, but the lady is with you all the time. Is it some trick or is it that you are truly married? I cannot believe it could happen so fast after the way we talked yesterday morning, but such things are possible. Please where can I see you to talk to you? Hans."

"When you finish that tea, we'll go below," Gabriel said. "He wants to see me, and he doesn't know where you stand."

"The poor chap," she murmured. "He was dreadfully uneasy. Why don't you run down yourself and see him, Gabriel?"

"All right. You don't mind being alone? I'll be right back."

"Not a bit of it," she replied. "It's lovely up here."

"Yes," Gabriel said, glancing up at the bridge. "But you never know."

"It's really all right. Soucouyans wait until midnight."

IN THE cabin below, he rang for van der Decken, and when the steward arrived, Gabriel let him in and locked the door. "Keep it soft and low," Gabriel said. "And take it easy."

"*Leive hemel,* Gabriel, is it true? Are you married to *meisje?*"

"No," Gabriel said. "But if you tell a soul, I shall have to cut your throat. It will grieve me, but there it is. There wasn't any other way she could sail. It's a very respectable arrangement. You've got to play it that way with us. Might be dangerous if you don't."

"*Ja,* I play it," van der Decken said. His eyes were bright. "Dangerous is the word, *mijnheer.* Those two men the soldiers took off yesterday morning, you know who they were?"

"Marines, not soldiers. Who were they?"

"Germans," said van der Decken. "Sailors from the *Graf Spee!*"

"No," said Gabriel. "They'd be fools to go to Trinidad. I don't believe it."

"They went to Trinidad to board the ship," van der Decken said. He wet his lips and took a breath.

"Gabriel, you must listen to me very sharply for it is mixed up but there is meaning in it.

"Those two were German sailors. From Captain Klinkert's own mouth I heard it. They had forged passports from Argentina, and the English captain said he was arresting them because he suspected they were escaped from internment. Do you see? *Spee* seamen, from Buenos Aires!"

Gabriel studied the steward silently, his jaw set. "Will you tell me why two Nazi sailors would make their way to a British port to board this ship? Why did they take the risk? They could have boarded her at Rio—"

He paused thoughtfully. "Unless we aren't going to Rio."

"But we *are* going to Rio."

"Don't be so optimistic," said Gabriel grimly. "What else?"

"That insurance man, Leeds, who came on night before last. Do you know what he did with the captain? He searched the ship, *mijnheer,* for infernal machines. He told Captain Klinkert he had evidence which pointed to the scuttling of the *Apeldoorn.*"

"They didn't find anything?"

"Not a thing." Van der Decken shook his head gravely. "This is a bad business. It is bad because Captain Klinkert says such a thing is mad. This ship is making good money. The Royal Dutch has never been involved in a scuttling. Never."

"I know," Gabriel said. "But maybe you're on the wrong tack."

"How do you mean, *mijnheer?*"

"Let's forget the Royal Dutch Lines and put the plot for scuttling on individuals. You said they were Germans. I think Thimm, the radio officer, is German. He isn't Dutch. He speaks English like an Englishman. He said he had lived in the United States for a long time, but if that were so, he'd speak some American slang."

"Suppose so? Then what, Gabriel?"

"Well, why, tell me why, would a group of Germans be interested in scuttling this ship? You've got fuel oil aboard. Is it bound for the Falklands, for British ships?"

"*Neen.* It is consigned to Rio de Janeiro."

"THEN it's oil from a neutral to a neutral. Why scuttle her?" Gabriel rubbed his chin reflectively. "It would be an act of war, almost."

"Why do you say almost?"

"Because it could skip the official sanction of the Wilhelmstrasse by being the piratical work of individuals. That's always a swell way for a country to crawl out of a hole. *But why?*"

"That can't be it, *mijnheer,* it must be something else."

"Then you tell me what it is. I'm giving up."

"I don't know. I wish I knew. But it is no daydream, I can tell. Captain Klinkert walks like a *kat* and he watches like a *havik.* You know the *kapitein* was never a nervous man but he is nervous today, *ja!*

"Those other passengers, they are Germans too. But they are Brazil Germans from the hinterland at Ouro Preto. They stay in their cabins and eat there. They never flew down from New York."

"I suspected not."

"They don't like me to go in the cabins. They take food at the door. This afternoon, one rang and I went and took tea. Very odd, *mijnheer.* They have opened no baggage. They have put their valises under the bed. *Vreemd?*"

"Tell me more."

"This woman—"

"Merrill, you mean?"

"*Neen,* not your *vrouw.* This other woman—"

Gabriel sat erect. "I meant to ask you about her. Who is she? I haven't seen a sign of her on deck."

"*Ja,* she does not leave her cabin at all."

"What's her name?"

"On the passenger list, it is Letti Gaynor."

Gabriel was electrified. He sprang to his feet and gripped van der Decken by the shoulders. "Small? Very pretty? Delicate face? Rather pale? Brown hair?"

"*Ja!* That is she."

GABRIEL grabbed his pipe and tobacco pouch and began to ram tobacco shreds into the bowl with fervor, packing them so tight that the pipe would never draw.

"I'm damned," he growled. "I'm damned."

"You know her?"

"Know her?" Gabriel said sharply. "I

have a screaming acquaintance with her. Is she with the other three men who came aboard?"

"I don't think so. She has been quite alone, except once, she talked with Mr. Steuber, but only for a minute."

"That's as far as you know," Gabriel said. "But how much do you see? Damned little. How did she get aboard if the cabins were bought up?"

"But she had bought one—in New York. She was meant to sail from New York. She was on the list there. She must have flown down to Port of Spain."

"Yes, of course," Gabriel said absently.

The picture was becoming much clearer, and he began to appreciate the Trinidad imbroglio. Miss Gaynor had had orders to detain him, if possible, to divert him from the *Apeldoorn*. He assumed that she and Fritz Steuber and Rudolph Thimm were confederates. That being so, it was Thimm who had wirelessed her in Port of Spain that he, Gabriel, had left the ship to procure an ancient fish, that he would plane in to Port of Spain, that he would put up at the Queen's Park.

Letti Gaynor knew then.

Her very presence indicated to him that the *Apeldoorn* would reach Bahia safely, for it was unlikely that the ship should meet with an accident with the girl aboard.

Possibly, and logically, Bahia would be the jumping-off place. From Bahia, the *Apeldoorn* would put to sea and disappear; and without doubt, Mr. Steuber's plans precluded the presence of anyone aboard inimical to the scheme.

IT WAS likely then that Letti Gaynor, Merrill and himself, were meant to be left behind at Bahia, somehow. The same idea had been worked on him, at Trinidad. The three young Germans who had managed to remain unseized by the British, would join Steuber in a command of the ship.

He wondered what would happen to Captain Klinkert, to Hans?

Nothing, of course. That was his satisfaction. Nothing at all would happen. They *were* going to Bahia. Letti Gaynor said so by being a passenger. So there was nothing to worry about. For Clements Leeds was a jump ahead of them. At Bahia, the authorities would be waiting.

Gabriel said, "I wouldn't tell Merrill—Miss Leeds—oh hell—I mean Mrs. Adams about Letti Gaynor, Hans."

"Ik versta het, mijnheer," said van der Decken. He nodded and then winked. "But I keep an eye on her all the same, *ja?"*

"That won't be necessary," Gabriel replied. "This is one time when a resumption of acquaintance might do *me* some good instead of her. If you want to keep an eye on anybody, keep it on Captain Klinkert, because no one can pull a thing while he's still master."

"I almost forgot!" van der Decken exclaimed, snapping his fingers. "You will eat with Captain Klinkert tonight." He grinned. "A honeymoon party with champagne."

"Oh Lord," Gabriel said, appalled.

"You will have to do it, *mijnheer,* unless—"

"No, we'll do it. Some one's at the door. Tell the captain it will be an honor." Gabriel opened the door at the sound of the knock, and Merrill came in.

"It's raining," she said cheerfully. "Sky is rather black too. Looks like a squall. I stayed deserted as long as possible." She glanced at the steward.

"He knows," Gabriel said.

"Oh?" She shrugged and smiled. "And what do you think, Mr. van der Decken?"

Hans van der Decken grinned, flushing a little. "I was only thinking, Juf-vrouw Leeds—*Neen!* Mevrouw Adams! I was only thinking that it is a pity that isn't true for Mijnheer Adams would be a very lucky fellow."

"Indeed he would," she replied gracefully. "I'm a rare catch. You turn a very pretty phrase; is your name Hans?"

"Ja, mevrouw."

"We're going to be friends, Hans. No woman could withstand such vigorous flattery."

VAN DER DECKEN grinned, bowed, pleased with her and himself. Then he stepped out and was gone, after an exchange of looks with Gabriel.

As soon as the steward's footsteps faded down the corridor, Merrill sank down wearily on the sofa. "Any news?" she said.

"Yes," Gabriel said. "Pretty good news. We're really on the way to Bahia and that means trouble is over, if your dad does good work."

"Dad will."

"Then you can relax. We're really going there, and I'm quite sure that whatever was planned is supposed to happen after the departure from Bahia."

"Were you worried about *me,* Gabriel?"

Gabriel shook his head.

His mind was on the threat to the *Apeldoorn.* He couldn't fathom it. He said absently, "As a matter of fact, no, Merrill. You're one girl who seems to be quite capable of taking care of herself.

"I was worried mostly about Captain Klinkert; his being such a stalwart soul, they would have had to murder him before they began any operations at all. And there was Thomas.

"I mean, it may be silly to worry about a fish, but this is the first time an *isopholis orthotomous* had turned up in literal aeons, and it would be a minor catastrophe—"

He did not see Merrill's approach until she was within striking distance. Instinct told him to duck—so did the blaze in her eyes. But he didn't duck. He just stood.

Her hand came up sharply and slapped him across the cheek.

"You—you idiot!" she stormed. And slapped him again.

Then, resolutely and firmly, she turned on her heel and went into the bedroom, closing the door behind her.

Gabe ran his fingers tenderly over the red welt on his cheek. He eyed the blankness of the door with imploring eyes. "Now would you please tell me what in blazes is biting her?"

"Turn around," said a low voice. "And be careful"

FROM the very beginning, the voyage on the *Apeldoorn* has been to Gabe Adams a discouraging mess.

In the first place, there are no other passengers aboard, which is strange; in the second place, two members of the ship's personnel—the radio man and the chief officer, old friends of Gabe's from previous trips—are missing. In the third place, the two men who have replaced them, under disquieting circumstances, are decidedly queer fish.

All of which stirs up several large question-marks in Gabe's brain, and he begins to suspect that the *Apeldoorn* is never intended to reach her destination.

Gabe has to leave the ship at Willemstad to pick up a valuable specimen of a fish hitherto believed extinct, which has been purchased by the Federal Museum, for which Gabe works.

While waiting to rejoin the *Apeldoorn* at Port of Spain, Gabe makes the acquaintance of a beautiful and accomplished stick of dynamite traveling under the name of Letti Gaynor. She tries every skill at persuasion that she possesses to have Gabe desert the *Apeldoorn* and complete his trip to Rio aboard her cruise ship. When everything else fails, she tries a version of the badger game by invading Gabe's room late at night and threatening to scream for help.

GABE is adroitly extricated from this uncomfortable situation by Merrill Leeds, who appears out of nowhere to send Letti Gaynor flying. Merrill is the daughter of the Lloyds' man at Port of Spain who has refused to insure either Gabe or his precious fish if Gabe insists on sailing aboard the *Apeldoorn*.

Gabriel questions Merrill, who admits that she knows something is going to happen to the Dutch freighter; she tells him her informant is the *Apeldoorn's* second officer, Cumstock.

Shortly afterward, Gabe learns from his pal, the steward, that Cumstock has been found in his cabin, dead by hanging. The authorities call it suicide, but the fact that

Cumstock was hanged in such a position that his feet could have touched the floor spells murder to Gabe.

IN SPITE of all this, or perhaps because of it, Gabe boards the *Apeldoorn,* and is scarcely surprised when things continue to happen. First the six passengers who had failed to sail from New York, turn up in a body—five men and a woman. Then the British Marines board the ship and interne two of the men, suspected of being fugitive seamen from the *Graf Spee.*

And finally, just as the freighter is weighing anchor, Merrill Leeds comes aboard and announces that she is Gabe's wife.

This news is received with great enthusiasm by the Dutch captain, who likes Gabe and quickly takes to Merrill.

Gabe plays along with her until he can learn what she is doing. Her father, she tells him, has reason to believe that the *Apeldoorn* will be scuttled; he has flown ahead to Bahia, the next port of call, to warn the authorities.

Every day, Merrill is to send an innocent-sounding message to her father's agent at Port of Spain; on the day the message fails to arrive, British units will be sent to establish contact with her.

And as a final precaution, various ships have been sent out to keep an eye on her all the way to Bahia.

"Scuttlers, you see," Merrill says, "like privacy. So it's perfectly safe, and I had to tell them we were married. Because there was no other way I could get aboard at the last minute, and I had to get aboard somehow."

Gabe accepts this in a spirit of mutinous submission, but he still scents danger. He feels a little more comfortable, though, when he discovers that the woman who had come aboard at Port of Spain is his friend Letti Gaynor.

If Letti is mixed up in whatever nastiness is being planned—and Gabe is prepared to swear that she is—then nothing will happen until she has had a chance to leave the ship. That makes everything safe until Bahia is reached, at least. And at Bahia, Clements Leeds has the authorities all primed and waiting.

It is in retailing this comforting information to Merrill that Gabe makes a bad mistake. He admits he had been worried, not about Merrill so much as about the ship and his friends on board and his fifty-million-year-old fish.

For some reason, Merrill resents this attitude and shows it by soundly slapping his face. . . .

CHAPTER XV

DREGS OF A PARTY

AT EIGHT P.M., the dining saloon presented several surprises, not the least of which were the gay decorations. From the four corners of the room were strung multi-colored streamers, interspersed with Japanese lanterns.

The lanterns swung to and fro with the motion of the *Apeldoorn,* a motion which had been increasing steadily since late afternoon, for both wind and rain from the northeast had reached them, and the combers which had deepened, gathering force in their long sweep toward the distant and invisible coast, had forced the freighter off her axis heavily.

Being blessed with a castiron stomach that would have done credit to a North Sea trawlerman, Gabriel felt fine; but he wondered about Merrill. She wouldn't be able to hide it if she were ill. Her dinner gown was a beautiful crimson, and the hue of *mal-de-mer* would clash with it at once.

He didn't ask her what sort of sailor she was, for he didn't want to put the thought of seasickness in her mind. The very thought had the insidious facility of making itself a reality.

Merrill, however, was completely at ease, though oddly aloof. She had never, he conceded, looked more beautiful.

They approached the dining saloon in some trepidation, and the sight of the decorations did not make them any more at ease. Beside this, the ship's cook had fashioned a marvelous replica of the *Apeldoorn* in cake form with icing to match the ship's paintwork, with the legend, *Happiness,* taking the place of the ship's name.

It was a fine thing and their faces showed it. Gabriel, being a realist, wondered what the cook had used to make gray icing for the cake ship's sides.

The other surprises followed in brief order. It was really a party! Captain Klinkert was waiting for them, dressed in stiff whites. Beyond him was Letti Gaynor, in a white gown touched with the flash of rhinestones.

Her pale skin was almost as white as her dress, and she looked sleek. And, Gabriel thought, a trifle preoccupied. Her mind wasn't on the situation. The *Apeldoorn* rolled sharply and Letti was doing her best. Gabriel felt sorry for her. He gave her ten minutes at the outside.

In her company were the three Germans, all good-looking fellows. They were big and broad, all dark-skinned from the sun, and they were perfectly at ease.

"Kom binnen hier!" Captain Klinkert said lustily. *"Ja,* my love-birds, come in and we sit down and eat! You are surprised? You come for dinner and you find a wedding party! But why not?"

He laughed. "Every time I think of Gabriel as a blushing *bruidegom,* with such a fine *meisje,* I give thanks! For a long time I was afraid he was going to settle down and marry a sardine or a tuna! But you have saved him from a watery domesticity, Mevrouw Adams. You name the first one after me, *neen?"*

MERRILL laughed. "You're rushing me, Captain Klinkert. I'm still not sure that I've won him away from that fish he has with him."

Captain Klinkert looked stricken and made a terrible face, his mustache hiding the end of his nose completely. "What kind of jackass are you, Gabriel, that you would take so fair a bride in the company of a fish? And such a face, a million years old—"

"Fifty, Captain."

"—it must have an odor—"

"Don't be silly." Gabriel looked amused. "It's stuffed. And it's a very important fish."

"As important as your wife, Gabriel?"

It was an unfair question and only Klinkert would have proposed it.

Gabriel said bluntly, "It's a very important fish."

Merrill said lightly, "There are so many girls who'll do as wives, Captain. But there is only one fish of this kind in captivity. It means everything to Gabriel. I don't know why myself." She smiled at him.

Gabriel scowled. She wasn't playing the game.

"Gabriel is a fool," said Captain Klinkert. *"Ja,* but for a fool, his rummy is miraculous. You have a hard job with that blockhead. Well, it's getting late and I am hungry as an elephant. We eat, *neen?*

"But first, we meet the guests. I am sorry we do not have more passengers for we would have a big party, but we will do the best we can, *ei?* This is Juf-vrouw Gaynor."

"But we've met," Merrill said crisply. "How do you do?"

Captain Klinkert said, "You know each other?"

"Oh, yes," Letti Gaynor said, flashing her teeth. "Mr. Adams showed me the Botanic Gardens in Port of Spain, and Miss—Mrs. Adams showed me an—exit I couldn't find. It was so sweet of her."

Gabriel bowed charmingly and shook hands with her. "I didn't know you were sailing on this boat," he said with irony. "You should have told me. You've stolen the delights of anticipation." She smiled woodenly.

"And these three gentlemen," Captain Klinkert said, "are Mijnheer Franks, Mijnheer Leiper, Mijnheer Stuttger. They do not speak English or Dutch, only German and Spanish; but that Stuttger, he has a fine head of hair, hasn't he? *Ja,* he should be Dutch with hair like that!"

They assembled at the table and sat down. "You may choose any champagne your heart desires, *mevrouw!"* Captain Klinkert exclaimed. *"Ja, hier is de wijnkaart.* The *bruid* picks the *wijn* for her party!"

Merrill laughed. "For a gruff old bachelor, you have a way with you, Captain," she said.

"Gabriel, you hear what she called me? *Vrijgezel!* She is a bold one!"

"Chateau Blanc 1923," Merrill said, with her finger on the place in the list.

Captain Klinkert shook his head, chuckling merrily. "That we do not have. You try again. Maybe I should give you a hint, *ja?* You keep looking till you come to Pommer 1928 and then you choose that.

It's the only *wijn* we have aboard, and *het is verschaald!*" He enjoyed his joke hugely.

IT PROVED to be true. The wine was *verschaald*. The wine was flat. And so was the party. Hardly festive, it managed to progress only under the whip of Captain Klinkert's forced gayety. But Letti Gaynor deserted them hurriedly at the sight of the shrimp cocktail.

The three Germans, who admired Merrill with broad smiles and white teeth, never said an intelligible word. When the dinner was over, they did not linger.

Merrill thanked Klinkert for his kindness. He had made a gallant try. Captain Klinkert kissed her hand like a cavalier. Gabriel thought he looked very silly doing it. Then they left.

"You're a rotter," Merrill said sharply, as they went up to the smoking-room for cigarettes. "You didn't tell me she was aboard."

"I knew you'd meet her sooner or later. What difference does it make?"

"You should have told me. What is she doing here? Is she following you?"

Gabriel said, shrugging, "It's a flattering prospect, but I don't think so."

"She's very pretty, isn't she?" Merrill said. "I didn't get a good look at her in the hotel. And of course she was at a disadvantage tonight. *Mal-de-mer* makes one look so wan."

"That remark is catty and smug."

"I intended it to be so. You do like her, don't you?"

"She's rather cute," Gabriel said objectively, "and very feminine."

"I know. I heard her scream."

Gabriel chuckled. "You sound like a jealous wife."

Merrill whirled around and stared into his eyes. "Why should I be jealous of you?"

"I didn't say you were," he answered. "But you don't have to play the wifely part with such fervor when we're alone."

"My word," she breathed, "you *are* a bumpkin. Please give me a cigarette. No, never mind, I'll smoke my own. Take me downstairs to my cabin."

"Our cabin," he said.

"Your cabin," she said, coolly. "Thank you."

They went below. Merrill said good night curtly and vanished into the bedroom. Gabriel knocked on the door and said, "Throw out my pajamas, will you? I don't want to sleep in this suit all night."

She took him at his word, literally, and threw out his pajamas. Gabriel picked them up, frowning. He listened at the door and he thought he could hear her crying but that didn't make sense.

He didn't know what was the matter with her. And he was glad in a way that she had shown some temper, for it had brought him up short. She was very easy to fall in love with. That, on top of everything, would have been unfair to her.

CHAPTER XVI

ARMS AND THE LADY

THE storm did not gain in violence, and the *Apeldoorn* was not forced to reduce speed. The roll was not so bad, really, when you got used to it.

Gabriel kept his dinner jacket on and smoked his pipe, lying back on the sofa with his feet on a side table. When the bowl had burned low, he put it aside and took the crate out of the closet and opened the lid. He got some paper and a pencil and began to examine *Isopholis Orthotomous* closely, making notes as he did so.

Then his mind wandered. The sleeping arrangement, he saw, would work out in strict privacy. There was nothing immoral about it at all. It was so completely private, as a matter of fact, that he resented it a little.

The sitting room was very quiet. He felt lonesome. He thought of knocking on the door and asking whether she was comfortable. His watch told him it was past eleven. She was probably asleep.

He went back to the fish, then left it and knocked on her door. He waited until he heard her say, "Yes?"

"Good night," he said. "Hope you have a good sleep." He thought he sounded

asinine. She didn't answer for a moment.

He started from the door, then heard her call, "Gabriel!"

He waited. The lock turned and she opened the door half-way. She was in silk pajamas with a white robe thrown around her.

"I didn't mean to disturb you."

"I wasn't asleep," Merrill said. Her eyes were a little red, but she had disguised her face well with powder. "I wanted to tell you something."

"What?"

"Steuber, the chief officer. I've been trying all day to remember him, but I can't. But I know I've seen him somewhere before. I know it."

Gabriel felt quickly cold and alert. "You do! Do you think he recalled you?"

"No, I'm sure he didn't," she said. "I'm positive he doesn't remember ever having seen me. But I remember him—on some ship probably. Although I never traveled on a Royal Dutch boat before."

"A British ship?"

"I don't think so. It might have been the *Cologne*. Dad and I went to Bremerhaven four years ago aboard the *Cologne*. We were on our way to Copenhagen, and she was the fastest ship. She was German. I'm not sure though. It might have been the *Vulcania* coming home again."

"No. She's Italian. Must be the *Cologne*. It's got to be."

"Why?" Merrill asked.

"Because she's gone, you know that! The Nazis had to scuttle her off the coast of Virginia when a British cruiser caught up with her. She was caught at Vera Cruz when the war began and she made a run to New York to take refuge there with the *Mary* and the *Normandie*.

"She couldn't try a trans-Atlantic dash like the *Bremen;* she was too late. And when the British caught her, the Nazis opened her seacocks, and set her afire. They did it with the *Columbus* later, further north."

"I remember all that," she said. "I don't see—oh."

"Of course! Steuber isn't a Dutchman at all. Excellent seaman, Hans said. And why not? The man was formerly an officer of one of the fastest, sweetest German liners in the business!"

"Don't get so excited. I still don't see what purpose he would have in sinking this boat. A harmless freighter, neutral—"

She caught sight of the pop-eyed ganoid reclining on the table. She gnawed at the corner of her pretty mouth a moment, and then forced a smile. "Were you working on your fish, Gabriel?"

"I was making a report on it," Gabriel said. "I don't see myself why Steuber—" He chewed on the back of his index finger. "But there's an answer. There's a simple answer. I'm going to find it."

Merrill seemed not to have heard him. She sighed and looked away from the fish. "Well," she murmured. "I'm afraid you're hopeless."

He frowned at her. "I don't get you, Merrill."

"Oh, I know," she replied plaintively. "You don't get me at all. Good night, Gabriel. Don't stay up too late working." She closed the door.

HE WAITED ten minutes to let her fall asleep, and then he rang for Van der Decken. The steward took a little time coming, and when he arrived his cap was rain-flecked and he was wearing oilskins.

"Have you been on deck?" Gabriel asked.

"Yes, *mijnheer,*" said Van der Decken. "Bad news." He looked studiedly worried. He glanced around the room, then at the closed door. "She has retired?"

"Yes. Hans, I want to know the cabin number of the Gaynor girl."

"Same as yours on the starboard corridor. *Waarvoor?*"

"I intend to pay her a friendly visit. Is she still sick?"

"Much better," Van der Decken said. "Mr. Steuber himself took care of her. Gabriel, I wouldn't go near there."

"Why not?"

"There is something between those two. Forgive me, *mijnheer,* but it is dangerous. I feel it. I am not psychic, you know that, I

am a clod farmer. But tonight I feel things."

Gabriel said, "You're upset, Hans."

"Ja."

"Where is that stolid Groningen calm of yours?"

Van der Decken did not look amused. His eyes were dark. "You should ask Captain Klinkert where his Rotterdam calm has gone."

"He seemed affable enough at dinner."

"Now is not dinner. Time has passed."

"What's wrong? Bad news you said."

"He thought he heard a distress signal."

Gabriel felt a thrill of excitement. "A ship is in distress near us? In this storm? I didn't think it was so bad; the lady is riding it very well."

"No, *mijnheer,* you do not understand." Van der Decken was impatient. "He heard it from his own cabin. He couldn't hear a signal being received, only being transmitted."

Gabriel's face began to sag under the weight of the inference. "You mean that *this* ship sent out an s o s? The *Apeldoorn?"*

"That is what I mean. We are not sure—"

"But we're not in distress!"

"Neen, of course not. How do you think the captain felt when he heard that, eh? He wants to see you at once."

"The ball begins to roll," Gabriel murmured. He stared at the steward. "Why does Klinkert want me?"

"To trap Thimm."

Gabriel nodded. "That will be easy. But it won't explain anything. Thimm won't talk. We've got to know the whole answer so that we know what we're fighting. Those three Germans are literal sphinxes.

"But there is one cohort who'll switch allegiance to save her neck at the first sign of breakup. Letti Gaynor. The literal rat who deserts the sinking ship. You wait here. I'll go see what I can do with her."

HE LEFT van der Decken in the sitting room and prowled the starboard corridor until he found Letti's cabin. He knocked and said, "It's Gabriel, my dear. How are you feeling?"

She opened the door at once.

"Much better," she said. She puzzled at him. She had her glasses on and they were not unbecoming.

"That's good," Gabriel said. "I'm coming in. I want to talk to you."

"Has the mouse turned lion? You even roar. But you can't come in, darling. I'm not dressed."

Gabriel pushed open the door and stepped in and closed it. "Don't be silly," he said. "If anybody's virtue is unsafe in this room, it's mine, and I promise not to scream.

"No, don't take off your glasses, for heaven's sake. I know how you look without them, and I want to be sure you see me when I speak to you. You look very engaging."

She pulled her negligee around her, the white satin shimmering in the light; and she smiled, amused at his boldness. "But really, Gabriel. My reputation—"

"Reputation? That gimcrack must be something you picked up since that night at the Queen's Park, for you weren't worried about it then."

"Why, Gabriel, this is so sudden. You're marvelous. You can bite! All right, what can a lady do? You force your way in, you glower at me, and I quake in my boots and retreat in terror."

"Have a cigarette," he said. "And let your hair down. You're acting all over the place, and that means you're worried. Sit down and let's talk."

She accepted a cigarette. He lighted it for her. She climbed into her berth and pulled up the covers as he observed, "I'm going to tell you some of the things you are, Letti."

"You mean, make love to me? What would your wife say?" She watched him slyly and then laughed.

"My wife is very broadminded," he replied with a sigh. "She's used to these clandestine jaunts of mine. Never says a word. Now listen to me. Stop feeling smug, come out of that 'I-have-command-

of-the-situation' fog, and use your head. It's a pretty head, I admit. But you aren't using it."

"What makes you think so?"

"Circumstances," he answered. "You are heading for trouble. And I don't mean mere complicity in the attempted seizure of a ship."

She stopped smiling and inhaled a long drag on the cigarette. Gabriel walked over to the bed and stared down at her. "Do you know what I mean?"

"No. But go on. It's very thrilling."

"So is hanging, when you watch one. But it isn't so thrilling on the receiving end. I'm talking about Joseph Cumstock. You probably never heard of him. I doubt if either Steuber or Thimm, or the German boys let you in on that bit of news. But that doesn't change the picture any. Whether you know or not, you're an accessory before and after the fact."

"This is good elemental melodrama," Letti said wearily. "Who is Cumstock, Gabriel, and how did I kill him and why?"

"Joseph Cumstock was second officer of this ship until it got within spitting distance of Trinidad. Then he was murdered, strangled and hung in his own closet, to make it appear like suicide."

"Poor chap," Letti murmured. "Then behind all this barrage of yours is the fact that he did commit suicide, or else the port authorities in Port of Spain wouldn't have let the *Apeldoorn* sail."

GABRIEL scowled at her. "That's true. But I expect them to change their minds. One of your crowd is going to talk and tell the whole story. I'm giving you a chance to talk first and save your neck."

"I'm really not interested in saving my neck your way, darling. I'm having a lovely trip, and I think if I could be even a fairly good sailor I could learn to love the ocean. I've always hated it. You look cute, with your mouth all tight like that."

She patted his cheek. "It was a pleasure working you in Port of Spain. I expected a sour old professor to handle, you know."

"How much did Steuber pay you?"

"The question is much too direct." She laughed. "Don't be stupid, darling. You really don't expect me to answer it."

"You admit you were paid for the job?"

"I admit nothing at all." Letti shook her head, laughing and put out the cigarette. "Come on, Gabriel, stop sparring. You do it too clumsily. What do you want, exactly?"

Gabriel sat down on the foot of her bed, close to her. "I'm perfectly willing to come to the point, if you're willing to act natural and skip the wisecracks."

"All right. I'm all ready to be startled."

"Thimm will be in irons in ten minutes or so. At least in the brig. Captain Klinkert caught him sending out a phoney distress signal. We can presume that even you were being double-crossed, eh?

"You see, Merrill's father happens to be Clements Leeds, the Lloyds' man in Port of Spain, who flew on ahead to Bahia to check on the visas of Stueber and the German boys, Franks, Stuttger and Leiper. We can assume that means that in Bahia, the executors of this would-be marine *putsch* will have been taken off ship and jailed. Do you follow me?"

Letti nodded, her eyes uneasy.

"Thimm and Steuber must see the jig will be up in Bahia, and have promptly set your unknown plot in motion with a false distress signal which Klinkert heard. So Thimm, Steuber and the boys are at the end of the trail."

"What of me, Gabriel?"

"Simple enough. I'm willing—and Merrill will do as I say—to forget all about your operations in Port of Spain if you tell me right away what the devil the whole thing was about.

"Leeds was working from the idea of a scuttling, but I can't believe it was only that. You talk, and you get a clean bill. You don't, and it's the brig, too." He tapped her hand. "I am not being humorous."

SHE lighted another cigarette nervously and avoided his eyes. Her hand was shaking a little when she raised the match.

"You want me to tell all now?"

"Good for your soul, Letti. Lessen the burden upon your black heart." He could see she wasn't ready yet. So he stalled.

"It's obvious you're a Nazi agent. If Steuber didn't pay you, some one remotely connected with the Wilhelmstrasse did or is supposed to. You're hardly a patriotic *wandervogel* giving your all for the Cause, like poor Steuber. You're a hard-boiled mercenary; and knowing you, I knew your price is high."

"That's very good," Letti said. "I don't mind telling you you're right. But my price isn't as high as I'd like. You don't have to make it sound so obnoxious, my boy. It's a job."

"Diplomatic gold-digging? I suppose it is. But hardly the job for you. I know, it's exciting and thrilling; and not having any roots in the ground, you think that's what you're looking for. But it isn't.

"I don't know your past, Letti, and what got you into this sort of mess, but you're a fool to have done it, knowing yourself. You haven't the *maag* for this kind of stuff. It's all intriguing when it goes well, but you've never had it slip up yet, have you? You'd go to pieces if it did. Literally to pieces.

"It's a job for guts, not superficial sang-froid. You'd better play with me, or you'll find that out shortly."

"You're vulgar, darling, and so unchivalrous. I seem to be holding together pretty well in the face of your catastrophic disclosures, don't I?"

"Yes," said Gabriel with sarcasm. "Because you don't believe a word I've told you. That being so, I won't waste time around here. For the last time, will you or will you not disclose?"

"Bless your heart. You're so righteous, I hate to bring the matter up myself, but we haven't touched upon the sum at all."

Gabriel rose from the bed. "What you lack in *maag,* you make up in nerve. There's no point in going on. I'll see you in jail." He walked across to the door and put his hand on the latch.

Letti giggled. "Now pause dramatically and make one last try. If we had a script, that's what the stage direction would be."

"I feel sorry for you," Gabriel said honestly. There was nothing smug in his attitude. "You're in the sort of thing where you can't trust a soul, even the man you work with. You think I've been lying to you, you think I'm trying to trick you. Yet you'd sell out Steuber for a rounder fee than you're being paid.

"Or is it that you aren't being paid because you didn't do the job right? It doesn't make any difference to me any more."

"Dear Gabriel, you sound hurt. Did you come with such gallant motives and did I blast them?"

"Not in the slighest," he said. "I came exchanging freedom for information. I'll get my information elsewhere, but you'll not be as lucky with your freedom.

"You aren't in any position to bargain, Letti. If I've told the truth, you're sunk; and if I haven't, you're sunk anyway, because this ship wouldn't be heading for port in that case, and you'd be caught on it as well as the rest of us.

"You can only burn the candle at both ends until the flames reach each other. That's what's happened now. Good night."

"I'll think it all over," Letti murmured, frowning.

"Sorry," he said. "It's too late for that." He went out and closed the door behind him.

BACK at his own cabin, Gabriel told Van der Decken, "No good. She's afraid to talk. Let's go. How do we get Thimm?"

"You once told me you knew Morse, *mijnheer.*"

"I know Morse code," Gabriel said reluctantly. "I'm no radio operator though. I'm not sure I could pick it up by sound. I used a heliograph when we were on a field trip in Yucatan. I can handle Morse by sight as if it were English, but the sound of it may confuse me. It's one thing to read code by light flashes and another to listen to it. My ears aren't trained—my

eyes are—but still, I might get something."

"Goede!" Van der Decken exclaimed. "You come up with me to the captain."

Behind them the door creaked open and Merrill stood there.

"Gabriel, wait!" she said "Wait, please." She came out of the bedroom and thrust something into his right hand—a thirty-two caliber revolver.

"Dad told me to bring it. You'd better take it with you. I'll lock the door until you come back. You may need it if you go and see that woman again. I won't be able to stop her screaming a second time."

Gabriel turned back, confused.

"Merrill, listen to me; you don't understand. I went to see her for a purpose. She knows what's happening, what's going to happen. Don't you understand that? I was going to try and pump her."

"You don't have to explain anything to me, Gabriel," she said. "You know that. We're not really married, it's an arrangement. A gratitude arrangement. You said so yourself."

"But I want you to understand—"

"I don't have to understand. I haven't any claim on you."

"Let's go," said Van der Decken. "We should not waste time."

Gabriel grabbed a coat and followed the steward out. Behind them the door locked. They hurried along the corridor toward the main staircase.

"You're a blind man," Van der Decken said. "You're not flinty like you said. *Neen, neen,* you're dull as limestone."

"What do you mean, Hans?"

"Don't sound so growly, *mijnheer.* It's pain enough. The *meisje* is sorry that this marriage isn't real."

"What?"

"She is in love with you."

"You're crazy," Gabriel said. "What would a girl like that see in me?"

He caught the flash of nickel in his hand and stared down at the revolver she had left there. He slipped it into his pocket, keeping his hand on it, and he followed Van der Decken up the stairs at a run.

CHAPTER XVII

DOUBLE-CHECK

OUTSIDE the night was black, and filled with the roar of wind. The thin rain drove hard, the thick scud blowing out across the deck like gray smoke.

They went along the bridge deck, the gusts thrusting their coats between their legs, giving them the look of cringing dogs. They knocked at the captain's door and went right in.

Captain Kinkert climbed to his feet and read in Gabriel's face that he knew. "You told him, Hans?"

"Ja, kapitein."

"Good." Captain Klinkert shut the door carefully and stuck the serpentine stem of his pipe into his mouth. *"Ga zitten,* Gabriel. I want to talk to you. This is a serious business and I want to take steps. I am going to take steps, *ja!* From you I want help."

"Why from me?" Gabriel said, taking a chair. "I'm only a passenger on this rattletrap. You've got lots of officers and crew."

"The *Apeldoorn,"* said Captain Klinkert with a faint smile, "is not a *sleepboot,* as you well know. Who insults my *schip* insults me. Be serious, Gabriel, and listen.

"It is true I have officers, but it is now a question if I should trust them. I do not know who is with me and who is against me. I do not know in fact whether I may be a big fool or not.

"It was that Leeds *erflater* of Port of Spain, who disturbed me. He came, on top of poor Cumstock dying, with this word of a letter from Cumstock which had been sent to him."

"You saw the letter?" Gabriel asked.

"Ja, I read it. Cumstock wrote it, sure enough." Captain Klinkert shrugged. "You know what a respectble *muis* Cumstock was. The trouble with his letter was he didn't say enough."

"What did he say?"

He told Mijnheer Leeds that he had secretly overheard a conversation amongst plotters which meant that the good *Apeldoorn* would be scuttled somewhere at sea

on this voyage. That was all that he said.

"Maddening, *neen?* He would not even tell me, mind you! That Cumstock—he was not sure but that the Line had instructed *me* to scuttle the *boot* for the insurance claims."

"And I suppose," Gabriel said dryly, "that in your own blunt and phlegmatic fashion, you dismissed Cumstock's note as the prattlings of a nervous breakdown, substantiated by his 'suicide', and you told Leeds you didn't believe a word of it and that you didn't want him searching your ship and bothering you with such—"

Captain Klinkert winced. *"Is het mogelijk,* Gabriel? You know me too well for comfort!"

"That's right then?"

The captain nodded.

"Ja, you are right. Now I am ashamed. I am not sure. I'm sure of nothing at all. Maybe Cumstock was telling the truth! Maybe this *Engelschman* Leeds knew what he was talking about.

"Listen, Gabriel, I would swear that I heard a distress signal transmitted, not received, you understand? Right here I was sitting, and the radio is next to this wall on the starboard side. I jumped up and went to the radio room.

" 'Thimm,' I said, 'what is this business, sending a distress signal?'

" 'Pardon, captain,' he said, 'I was receiving one, not sending.'

"Ja, he said that, he was receiving. How could I hear it, if he was receiving? You hear through the ear-phones; how could I hear? I asked where the ship was, and he said it was far north, near Puerto Rico, and there was plenty of assistance."

"What does that mean to you?" Gabriel said.

"MEAN? It would mean this. It would mean that if Thimm had sent out an s o s from this ship without a position, he had already established that we were in trouble, and if the ship should be scuttled, the first step has been taken. But, Gabriel, you *uil,* how can I be sure he was not telling the truth? It is a bad thing to accuse him and relieve him from his post if he is innocent. I have no proof—"

"And that's where I come in," Gabriel said. "You want me to send a routine message from the ship on the contention that if Thimm has really sent a distress call from the *Apeldoorn,* he cannot possibly transmit my message without giving shore stations something to take a bearing on, and also, to make his s o s out a lie, for routine messages would never be transmitted during distress."

"Exactly! Hans said you knew Morse, so Thimm cannot trip you by sending out gibberish. You will do it, Gabriel?"

"It will be," Gabriel said evenly, "a first-class pleasure. And what about Steuber?"

"Steuber?" said Captain Klinkert, frowning. "Is Steuber connected?"

"I have evidence that Mr. Steuber was a former officer on the German liner *Cologne* which was scuttled in December off the Virginia Capes. Wouldn't that mean he has escaped from interment?"

"Neen, you jackass. Merchant officers are not interned." Captain Klinkert looked thoughtful.

"Still, it would mean that he had falsified his papers in order to be assigned on this ship with the Royal Dutch lines. There is monkey business somewhere. I see why you ask about him.

"First you take Thimm, Gabriel. We take care of Stueber next. Steuber I will relieve and hold until there can be a check on his papers. But right now, this Thimm—"

"We'll take care of Thimm," Gabriel said. "Hans and I. But if I were you, I wouldn't waste any time looking Steuber over. Take him out of circulation at once and investigate him at your leisure. You've got enough grounds to go on, as far as he is concerned."

"Ik vermoed het wel," Captain Klinkert said thrusting out his mustache. "I will do that now myself."

"And take a gun," said Gabriel. "You never can tell. We'll be back here in around five minutes."

HE AND Hans ducked out into the rain again and went around the other side of the bridge deck to the radio shack. They stepped in noisily and slammed the door.

Thimm jerked up from his seat and stood before his transmitting equipment with the expression of an animal at bay. His mouth was wet, his skin dead white, and his nostrils were dilated. "Yes, Mr. Adams?"

"Sit down, Thimm," Gabriel said easily. "I didn't mean to startle you. I wanted to send a message."

Thimm seemed to relax a trifle. "Of course," he murmured. His voice was hoarse. He cleared his throat. "If you'll just write it out there . . ."

Gabriel scribbled on the proferred blank. "Clements Leeds, care of Lloyds Agent Bahia. Have definite evidence that *Apeldoorn* chief officer Steuber is former officer of German liner *Cologne*. Please check on this before arrival Bahia."

He gave it to Thimm whose nerve was not so good. Thimm's hands shook when he read the message and he did not dare meet Gabriel's eyes.

Gabriel said, "All right?"

Thimm coughed over the ragged edge of his voice. "Yes, sir."

"Nice cozy place you have here," Gabriel said. "I always wanted to see how a radio man worked."

Thimm smiled wanly. "Yes. I'll send this right off, sir."

"Good," said Gabriel. "Go ahead. I'll listen."

Thimm looked at Van der Decken who returned the stare ominously. The steward was in a dangerous mood, weary of foot-padding, and he was flexing his hands and marking the nape of Thimm's neck.

"Go ahead," Gabriel said, cheerfully, the palms of his hands wet.

"Now, sir?"

"Yes, why not?"

"I can't send it now, Mr. Adams. There was a general call to clear the air a few moments ago, and then a distress signal. I can't come in on the air with an s o s in the air. It might jam the signals for the stricken ship and prove disastrous. My license—"

"Who sent the s o s, Thimm?" Van der Decken demanded gruffly.

"I'm not accountable to you, steward," Thimm said sharply and firmly. "And I resent this compulsion. If you have any complaint to make about my behavior, Mr. Adams, you must see the captain."

Gabriel glanced at Van der Decken who stepped to the door and locked it. Gabriel rose and moved to a place behind Thimm. "Send the message, Thimm."

"This is an outrage!" Thimm said shrilly. "I'll call Captain Klinkert!"

"He sent us," Gabriel said. "Either send the message, Thimm, or consider yourself under arrest. Don't tell me I haven't the power to arrest you. If there has been a distress signal, why wasn't it reported to Captain Klinkert instantly so that the *Apeldoorn* could render assistance?"

"Are you a licensed operator? Do you know Morse and the rules of transmission?" Thimm asked sharply. "You're a passenger, you've no right—"

"I don't know the rules," Gabriel said. "But you either transmit that message to Bahia or take your toothbrush down to the brig."

"I refuse to send, Mr. Adams."

"Good. Get the hell away from that key. That tears it, Hans. He did send out a distress call from this ship with a false position probably so that any aid will go to the wrong place. He can't send my message because a sinking ship wouldn't pass a routine message if its radio had failed as Thimm faked the failing of this one. Get away from that key, Thimm. I'll see—"

"Look out!" Van der Decken shouted suddenly. *"Pas op!"* He lunged forward from the door.

THIMM had slipped his hand into his table drawer before him where he sat and he tried to whip the dark pistol from its place there. Gabriel saw its bulk as it came out; but Thimm was hardly quick enough, having opened the drawer too lit-

tle so that his hand, wrapped on the stock, caught in the narrow aperture.

Gabriel cracked the barrel of his own revolver across Thimm's wrist with snapping force. Thimm yelling in pain released the other gun. Then Gabriel jerked the little man upright and shoved him across the room.

Thimm hit the wall with a thud and stood there, his eyes watering at the pain in his wrist where the line of the gun barrel had left a red welt. Gabriel gave the pistol to Van der Decken, found him shaking with excitement.

"It's such a boring life at sea, isn't it, Hans?" he said.

"*Ja,*" said Van der Decken boyishly, when he could catch his breath. He swallowed hard and grinned weakly. "That was quick work, Gabriel, you went so fast. Come, we take him to the captain, *ei?*"

"Yes," Gabriel said. "You walk ahead of us, Thimm, and don't make a pass the wrong way."

Thimm did not answer. His lips were white and his chin trembled. But he had lost his fear and regarded them with eyes in which rage had been trapped.

They opened the door and went out, around the bridge deck to the portside where they knocked on Captain Klinkert's door and went in. The room was empty. Gabriel said, "Stay here with Thimm and keep a gun on him. I'll see what goes on. Which is Steuber's cabin?"

"Two down from here," said Van der Decken. "Maybe he was not in his cabin when the *kapitein* went to look for him."

"I'll see. Be right back."

Gabriel groped along the deck with the night wind whipping at his face. The darkness was vast, surging with the power of the seas and the wind. He shielded his face from the bite of the raindrops and found Steuber's door and walked right in.

He wished he had done it with more caution, for the scene was so abrupt and wrong as instantly to dash his satisfaction to pieces. Steuber was not there, true enough; but Captain Klinkert was—prone on the floor, looking bulky in his unconsciousness, with a swelling above his temples where a contusion slowly and slightly bled.

HIS first inclination, to render first aid and bring the blustery voice of Captain Klinkert back to life again, Gabriel managed to stifle. There was nothing seriously wrong with the captain. He had been rendered—and neatly too—*hors de combat.*

Two other objectives seized his attention; the wireless key and Fritz Steuber.

The wireless was obviously the wiser goal, except for certain difficulties. Could he operate a key, with his hand, who previously had operated only the button of a heliograph? Would he know how to handle the equipment in order actually to transmit? What position would he give?

He let the wiser course go for the lesser

a search for the escaped Steuber who had, he reasoned, fled below to rouse his three German confreres in the cabins on C deck, spreading the alarm, and inciting them to a minor blitzkrieg in the seizure of the ship.

Gabriel was disturbed, at this point, but not dismayed; for he could not see how four men could overwhelm and capture or destroy the crew of the *Apeldoorn* which out-numbered them five to one, not including Thimm or Steuber's fifth column in the person of Letti Gaynor.

Indeed, as he started below on Steuber's trail with a loaded revolver in his hand, Gabriel had no doubt that he could handle it alone if he handled it fast enough.

Thus he was rudely shocked when, from a vantage point on the boat deck as he ran for the midship staircase entrance, he saw the forms of the three Germans emanate from the doorway, below him on A deck.

He instantly vanished behind a funnel, forward, not daring to stand and accost them; for Stuttger carried a pistol in one hand, a flashlight in the other; and behind him came Leiper with an ugly sub-machine gun, Franks with side-arms in both fists.

They were heading forward, for the companionway to the bridge deck; and Gabriel felt then that everything was lost.

Still, Steuber did not come up. Had he gone to the enginerooms? Or had he gone to Merrill?

There was enough of the latter possibility to strike dread in his heart, and he left the cover of the funnel and scampered to the lobby at the head of the staircase. Here the dim lights burned grudgingly; there were many shadows.

The staircase complained tiredly, its wood groaning at the movement of the ship.

And under all the somber hush, the constant, familiar tremble of the propeller shaft reached him through his shoes, low in tone from its reduced r.p.m.'s due to the heavy weather. It was a pleasant, reassuring sound; constant, strong and imperturbable.

Gabriel went down the stair recklessly, reaching C deck breathless and afraid. He ran through the port corridor, sighting no one; and when he came to the door of his own cabin he burst in like a wild man, his gun ready.

Spying Merrill, pale and frightened, opposite the door, he cried, "Steuber—have you seen him—has he been here?"

"Gabriel—" she gasped, as if in warning.

"Stand still," Steuber said sharply. "Not a move, Mr. Adams. Not a breath. If you attempt to turn, I'll shoot you through the back. Drop your gun on the floor and then lock your hands behind your head."

GABRIEL stood frozen, stifling a gasp at the suddenness of Steuber's voice. He retained his revolver a moment until he saw in Merrill's urgent eyes the fact that it was useless to resist. He dropped the gun on the floor where it made a dull sound, and then he turned slowly.

"That is very sensible," Steuber said, with an audible sigh. "You may turn and kick your gun toward me."

Gabriel turned and kicked the revolver savagely at Steuber who picked it up without taking his eyes off either of them. The chief officer seemed intensely relieved. He voiced this by saying, "I thought you might be difficult, Mr. Adams, and I was prepared to kill you. But this is much better, for both of us."

He allowed himself a cold smile. "You are a very dangerous fellow, considering your calling, which tends to be misleading. I had considered you dull and dry, for which I apologize. You gave me a bad moment, and I suppose I have you to thank for forcing me into an action I had hardly contemplated at this time."

"Was it supposed to have happened after Bahia?" Gabriel croaked, trying to get control of his voice.

But Steuber had said all that he intended to say, for the moment. "Miss Leeds, you already have your instructions. Abide by them; believe me . . . As for you, Mr. Adams, I am giving you another cabin for the duration of this cruise. Follow along the corridor. Two doors down, you will find

a vacant cabin with an open door. When we reach it, step inside. And keep your hands where they are until I lock you in."

"Gabriel!" Merrill said, her voice tight.

"I guess I messed things up," he said quietly. "Good night, Merrill."

He stepped out in the corridor and started walking. Behind him he heard the click as Steuber locked her door. He found his own open door and stepped inside. He could hear Steuber behind him.

He said, "You can't win, Steuber."

Steuber did not reply.

"You can't get away with it, you know. They'll nail you. They've got Thimm already."

Steuber did not smile, but there was a flicker of amusement in his eyes. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Adams, but that I doubt. The *Apeldoorn* is no longer captained by Klinkert. By now this ship is entirely in my hands. Please listen to me carefully, for I don't wish to repeat myself."

Gabriel listened.

"I am locking you in this cabin for the night. You are to remain here. If you make an attempt to force the lock, if you are caught out of this room at all, you will be shot on the spot. I think that is explicit. Please don't be heroic, Mr. Adams. I will answer most of your questions in the morning and not before. Good night."

The door slammed shut, a key grated in the lock. The room went black. Gabriel tried the light, but it didn't work. He felt the fixtures, but the bulbs were gone.

He crossed to the porthole and looked out and did not see a thing, not even white seas.

He pulled his tie and collar off and sat down on the berth, trembling. He didn't know what to think.

CHAPTER XVIII

NO MORE QUESTIONS

IT WAS a long night. Gabriel didn't sleep through much of it. His throat dried and he drank quarts of water throughout the dark morning hours, abjectly censuring himself for the turn of events.

He felt that he had missed the train completely, had botched the whole thing. He could not have foreseen the fact that Steuber would have turned the tables on the more phlegmatic Klinkert, and escape with Klinkert's own gun. That was the captain's fault.

But somehow, Gabriel knew that he should have managed to forestall the seizure of the ship. He had been at loose, armed, and had accomplished nothing at all. From the funnel, he could have shot down Leiper and Stuttger and Franks.

But not really, in cold blood. No, he probably would do again exactly as he had done, even with the same result. Steuber had been a smart psychologist to ambush him in Merrill's cabin.

He tried to see what might ensue now. Merrill would not get off her daily greeting to Mr. Buxley in Port of Spain. That would start some action at least. She had said, in that case, her father would divert a ship to them to investigate. What ship? And diverted where?

Fritz Steuber wasn't going to remain long in the established steamship lanes. He would head for the open sea, as far as he could go, and lose himself and the *Apeldoorn* from the curious binoculars of other ships, even diverted.

How long would it be before Clements Leeds went into action anyhow? It was possible he would never go into action, for the phoney s o s might have seemed real enough at a short station. That had been a storm, and a false position. It was most reasonable for a rescuing ship to assume the *Apeldoorn* had foundered with all hands at the place Thimm had given out.

So if Clements Leeds accepted the s o s as bona fide, the *Apeldoorn* would be permitted to continue her obscure course, a vanished ship as far as the world was concerned.

Then what? Gabriel rubbed his head briskly. Steuber's whole strategy eluded him, for now it appeared that there was no immediate intention of a scuttling at all. It was something else, something more im-

portant, urgent, and sinister. But what—a running of the British blockade for Bremerhaven? He whistled plaintively to himself in the dark.

WHEN dawn showed, he was a wreck. His clothes were a mess, his hair was disheveled and his face was gaunt.

He watched through the porthole to mark the course of the *Apeldoorn,* for if they were bound for the Reich, he would not see the sun rise. He was on the port-side which, if the ship went north, meant that he would watch the blue-black west.

This was what he expected. Instead, he saw the rim of the red sun against the green sea in the east, and the face of the sun was pocked with ragged edges of fleeing nimbus clouds, running with the wind.

The rain had stopped, the seas had dropped considerably, and the *Apeldoorn's* movements were remarkably steady, with only a slow pitching and no roll at all.

Gabriel studied the sea. Unless the wind had shifted, it was still from the northeast. It had to be from the northeast, for there was the sun to prove it. The *Apeldoorn's* steadiness resulted from the fact that she was churning along in a following sea which she had always liked. Following and on the port quarter. Gabriel gaped, for the ship was heading south.

South! Gabriel conjured an atlas in his mind and could see only the open spacious reach of the South Atlantic Ocean, unmarked by any rash of land, ending in the Weddel Quadrant of Antarctica.

When the sun had left the rim of the sea and had begun to lose its red glow for a more brilliant yellow, there was a knock on the door. Gabriel went to it and called, "Yes? I'm up."

A key turned in the lock and the door was opened. Outside was Stuttger, he of the healthy hair. Only last night at a party, Captain Klinkert had admired that head of hair. But it was hidden now beneath an officer's cap and Stuttger was in uniform. At his hip, from his belt, was a leather pouch. He held a gun in his hand.

"Well?" Gabriel said tiredly.

Stuttger spoke evenly in German. "*Kommen Sie.*"

"I don't know what you mean," Gabriel said. "I can't speak it. Take it slowly. If it's like Dutch—come with you?"

Stuttger wanted him to go to the dining saloon. He shrugged and went down the corridor across the main lobby and on to the stern where the dining saloon was located.

Here he had a surprise, for there were various crew members on their feet, variously scared, sullen, and curious. He saw Van der Decken with a white welt on his cheek, looking like a caged rhinoceros, head down, eyes up.

Merrill was there too, dressed in sport dungarees and a white cardigan, sleeves up to a point below her elbows. Great guy, Gabriel thought, in grim admiration.

She was sitting coolly on the edge of one of the tables, a little pale, but without a sign of terror or hysterics. She was smoking a cigarette and she did not run to him and throw her arms around him and burst out crying. She just said, "Hello, Gabriel. Come to hear the high council?"

She took his hand and squeezed it hard and smiled crookedly at him. Her eyes were faraway.

"Yes," Gabriel said nonchalantly, and it was genuine nonchalance for he was too tired to give a damn at that point. "You were lucky to get a change of clothes. I'm still in this monkey suit."

"We were told to be quiet," Merrill said. "You mustn't talk so loudly. See the gentleman with the gun?"

GABRIEL saw him. It was another of the German lads, Leiper this time, and he looked ugly because he was all taut in apprehension, and he held a sub-machine gun, waist high. It was the gun that made him ugly, for he unconsciously became a part of it.

Gabriel was grateful that he was not as nervous as Leiper, and at the same time, he did not like the idea of a nervous man gripping a machine gun with such purposeful intent.

There was no sign of the *Apeldoorn's* third officer, Swanson, of Captain Klinkert, of Chief Engineer Kroner, nor of Thimm or Steuber or Franks.

Gabriel called, "Hello, Hans, you all right?"

Leiper barked savagely in German, on edge. Van der Decken replied to Gabriel, "He says not to talk."

Gabriel looked at Leiper, annoyed. Merrill squeezed his hand again and whisered, "Please behave. There's no good in antagonizing him at this point."

"Why not?" Gabriel said with a smile. "All he can do is shoot us. If I don't get a shower and some fresh clothes soon, I'll shoot myself. I feel as if the camel had actually gone through the needle's eye. Did they treat you rough?"

"No."

"Steuber got me. What happened in the cabin?"

"Not now, Gabriel. You're making him angry."

"Is Thomas all right? *Isopholis Orthotomous,* I mean."

"Cut open and the stuffing taken out. They searched for weapons."

"Damn them!"

"Your old fish is all right. I restuffed him and sewed him up for you, pretty clumsily, but at least he isn't flat."

"Why Merrill!" Gabriel said, immensely pleased.

"Be quiet now. Some one is coming."

It was Steuber. Captain Steuber now. There was color in his cheeks and his chin did not look so sharp. He looked pleased with himself and not at all sinister.

He wore the same leather pouch on his belt as Stuttger had, and two pistols beside this pouch. Gabriel realized now what had been in the bags which the three Germans had not opened, an act which had previously disturbed Hans.

Fritz Steuber stood on a chair and looked the assemblage over carefully, counting heads. He was satisfied with the count. He briefly saluted Merrill when he met her eyes, and he smiled.

"What I have to say," he began in a normally polite voice, "is brief but exact, and I do not wish to repeat myself. So kindly lend me your attention so that there will be no misunderstandings.

"In the first place, I want to say that this is all the work of private individuals whose patriotism and devotion to the Cause has led them into this capture. No matter what happens, I am responsible for this."

Gabriel raised his hand. "Yes. Mr. Adams?" Steuber said.

"I'm only going on record as taking exception to the remark, Steuber. The mere fact that you assume responsibility for the enterprise doesn't lessen in the slightest the heavy hand of the Wilhelmstrasse in it."

Steuber smiled. "This is not a court of law, Mr. Adams, and I beg to point out that I am hardly on trial. Nor is the Wilhelmstrasse. Unless your queries are more pithy, please don't speak again until I finish."

"All right."

"I AM in control of this ship," continued Steuber. "That cannot be disputed. Captain Klinkert and his officers are prisoned in the brig where I assure you they will be treated decently and with respect.

"It is not our purpose either to terrorize or to injure any person aboard, as long as no one challenges our authority. As a safeguard against that, I wish to point out to you that Mr. Leiper is not only armed with a sub-machine gun, but also with hand grenades which he will not hesitate to use if necessary.

"The engineroom is under gun point. I have retained the junior officers there to handle the machinery, and they are guarded by Mr. Franks who has set up a light Brenn machine gun on the flywalk above the turbines.

"The bridge will be under my own control, the radio under the control of Mr. Thimm who is likewise armed. Mr. Stuttger will be a roving policeman overseeing the commissary and the passengers and

the deck crew, and Mr. Leiper likewise.

"The remainder of the crew here is to work as usual, when ordered, and to be locked in its quarters when not occupied."

Gabriel raised his hand. "No time bombs in the holds in case some one catches up with you?"

"Unfortunately, we did not have the opportunity of getting bombs aboard, Mr. Adams."

"The *Deutschland* boys who took over the *City of Flint* did better on that point. Never mind, Steuber, you've got us buffaloed, and I'm not reluctant to admit it. Are we to understand then that we are to retain our same cabins and go about normally, to meals and such, and have the freedom of the well deck forward for sunshine and air?"

Steuber said, "No. Mr. Adams. Not that. You will remain locked in the cabin I provided for you last night. You may move your baggage."

"You mean from now on, I have to stay in a cabin?"

"Exactly! There will be no lights. We blackout in the dark. All bulbs are being removed from the cabins and corridors now. We have confiscated all electric torches. Any attempt at lighting, even with matches, will meet with shooting on the spot. Is that plain?"

Gabriel nodded.

Steuber finished, "And remember all of you, that we will not tolerate the slightest attempt to sabotage our command. When I say shooting on the spot, I mean it, with no hesitation. This is war, you see, and even the most humane of us can be ruthless in the circumstance," he concluded quietly, thrust his hand up momentarily: "Heil Hitler."

Gabriel repressed an impulse to heil Roosevelt right back at him. It was hardly the time for bad jokes. He raised his hand in query, and then said, "One thing, Steuber, just one thing. Has the *Apeldoorn* been seized because she carries contraband? And how does she carry contraband if she is neutral and delivering cargo to a neutral in a neutral hemisphere? Has Holland entered the war in the last few hours or something?"

"The rights of neutrals are sometimes tenuous in wartime," Mr. Steuber replied coldly. "I refuse to answer your question."

"What is our destination?"

"Unknown."

"Oh, really!" Gabriel said.

"Unknown," Steuber repeated. His voice was cold. "I have nothing more to say. Are there any sensible questions?"

Van der Decken asked, "Suppose we refuse to work the ship?"

"Shooting," Steuber replied briefly.

No one else had any questions.

CHAPTER XIX

VOYAGE ON A DEAD SHIP

AT SIX-THIRTY that night—with dusk in the sky, and the east losing its pallor for night—Gabriel turned away from his porthole as the lock of the door noisily clicked.

He had hung by that porthole throughout the day; it was all he had left with which to see the world outside. From it he had watched the smoke of the *Apeldoorn,* thinned considerably, as it swept out across the graybacks.

From it, far to the east, he had seen an Italian freight ship, bound probably for Genoa. It had ignored them completely, no doubt of it, for the screw had never lost a beat.

His door opened, and Van der Decken came in with a tray, guarded from the doorway by Leiper, who held a pistol. "Good evening, *mijnheer,*" the steward said. His face was sullen, his eyes smouldered, and on his cheek was still the line of the welt. "This is the best we can do. The cook is imprisoned, there are no hot foods."

He paid no attention to the German behind him.

"Is Merrill all right?" Gabriel asked.

"Eilen Sie sich!" snapped Leiper, squinting. *"Kommen Sie!*

Van der Decken nodded a reply to Gabriel and shrugged to indicate the futility of a conversation. "He only speaks German, he won't allow anything else. Look under your plate." He turned and went out, and Leiper locked the door.

There were cold beans on the tray, one slice of bread, and a glass of milk. Gabriel raised the plate of beans and found a

letter under it. He pulled it out feverishly and ripped it open and read it.

It was from Merrill:

Gabriel. The German with Hans doesn't understand English, and that gave me the idea of writing to you and sending out the letter on my soiled tray after I had eaten. When Hans picks up my lunch tray, I'll slide this under a plate and tell him, and perhaps he can get it to you tonight when he delivers your dinner tray.

"Smart girl," Gabriel grunted. She had used her head while he beat his against an open porthole.

Mr. Steuber allowed me to get some air this morning, so I was able to see the ship. I asked him to let you come up but he insists you are dangerous and—as he put it—heroic, and might get yourself killed.

Anyway, we're up against it. They are completely in charge. A machine gun—heavy one—has been set up to sweep the fore and aft decks, and it also can command the port and starboard boat decks.

The name Apeldoorn *is gone from the life rings and the life raft and boats. We're now the* SS Weymouth, *and we fly the Canadian merchant flag, and another flag which I think signifies the Canadian Eastern Lines.*

The aft boom is gone, and the carpenter has made a false gun from it which is on the stern. They have put two stacks up on top where the one was before, and they look higher and thinner and entirely different.

The whole ship seems to have changed and I think that Steuber is actually duplicating a real ship, not an imaginative one. The crew was painting the hull all the time I was up. They were swung over in bosun's chairs.

I don't know if Steuber will give me another chance to go up tomorrow, but if he does, I'll tell you anything I learn. He only gave me ten minutes, and I admit I threatened hysterics if he didn't let me out of the room.

Please don't attempt to leave your cabin. They are all quite ruthless, and I don't doubt they would shoot you, or me, or anyone who does not obey. If you write to me tonight, you can slip it on your breakfast tray and Hans can deliver it to me.

I wish we were together.

Merrill.

GABRIEL read the letter again, while there was still light, and he ate the cold beans and bread and milk. The darkness fell quickly. He tore the letter in small pieces then and threw them out the porthole.

When Van der Decken returned and picked up the tray, he had to do so under the beam of Leiper's electric torch, which framed Gabriel fully and held on him to bare his every move until the door was locked again.

Only one word passed between the steward and Gabriel. "Tomorrow." And Van der Decken got the point. Tomorrow there would be a reply.

Gabriel was too disturbed to feel fatigue. He wished vainly for a light and something to read, for the solid darkness of the cabin frustrated him. He did not have many matches left, and he even put off writing an answer to Merrill so that he could conserve them. There would be time between sunup and breakfast for a note.

He was everlastingly grateful for the radium-painted dial of his wristwatch, for to tell time would have depleted his matches quickly in the dark. He stayed up until midnight, mostly kneeling by the porthole and watching for a light upon the seas his eyes commanded.

He finally stretched out on the berth below the port, still dressed. He tried to think. Then he remembered his sixteen millimeter motion picture projector. He sprang off the berth as if he had been slapped. "Good Lord!" he gasped. "What a fool I've been! Of course!"

It was an ace in the hole. It was a chance. It would be worthless until another ship met them. But then, if a ship passed, it would save every man-jack aboard. He had brought it on the journey for the purpose of exhibiting at the congress in Rio motion pictures of a successful fossil hunt in the Black Hills, Dakota, the preceding autumn, along with pictures of Federal Museum exhibits.

In the projector was a perfectly good two-hundred-fifty watt projection bulb

which operated on D C as well as A C, on a sixty-cycle one-hundred-ten-volt supply such as the *Apeldoorn* boasted. By using the beam of the projector as a searchlight, by shooting it upon the bridge of a passing ship, and then, with a card, breaking the beam into Morse flashes, he would have an improvised but thoroughly practical heliograph.

He pried open his trunk, his hands finding the leather case of the projector deep inside. He opened the case in the dark, lifted out the projector and eased the aereating cap off the bulb compartment. He struck one of his matches and groaned.

The bulb had been smashed.

For a moment, he could not let it sink in. When it did, he returned to his berth quickly, letting the projector stand where it was, for the letdown was terrific and he tried to cushion it by artifical casualness.

He consoled himself, when sang-froid failed, by admitting the chances for ever having been able to use the projector were so slight as to be within the mathematical realm of quintuplets. But he could not change the fact that it had been, however slight, a chance. He had no other chances now.

LYING there on his back, Gabriel thought he heard some one in the corridor, but when he listened again the place was silent as a tomb.

Nevertheless a key turned in his lock. The door opened and closed, and Gabriel knew he was no longer alone.

"Who's there?" he said sharply, not moving.

"*Gerust!* It is I, Hans."

"Hans! Are you crazy? If they catch you—"

"*Ja,* but they have not."

"Where did you get the key?"

"Master key from Purser Nardo's office. Stole it, *mijnheer.* Now we will whisper. It is safe."

"All right. Come over here. Tell me about the ship."

"The hull is mud gray, *mijnheer;* they painted out Royal Dutch and the big paint flags on the port and starboard. They've changed the nameplates even on the stern and at the bow. On the stern, they have mounted a six-inch gun which isn't real. The carpenter made it with assistance. He used the aft mast tip. But it looks real painted." He sighed heavily and said with bitterness, *"Het is een mooie dag."*

"Could have been worse," Gabriel said. "What's the idea of the gun?"

"I don't know. Perhaps all Canadian ships have mounted guns and if they wish to act the true part, they must do the same."

"Then there must be a real *SS Weymouth,*" Gabriel said sharply. "She must really exist."

"I think so absolutely, *mijnheer.*"

"Hans, can you get me a bulb?"

Van der Decken sighed. "Not a one. I haven't seen a one. All gone."

"How on earth did you swing this? Aren't you locked in at night?"

"Ja," said Van der Decken. "But Leiper left my key in the lock. I put a newspaper under the sill, pushed the key from the hole, and pulled the paper back inside with the key on it."

"Of course! Can I do it?"

"Neen. He carries your key with him. That is why I got the master key for you."

Gabriel admired the steward's nerve.

"You've been around," he said. "Is it possible to retake the ship?"

"Not possible, *mijnheer.* Not a chance. The brig is padlocked. Steuber himself has the key to it and the crew quarters. The rifle closet is under Steuber's thumb."

"Could we take the radio room?"

"We would die trying. They would only have to toss a grenade through the window."

"We've got to do something!"

"Not yet, *mijnheer.* We wait. I will keep a sharp eye. When the time comes—if there is a chance I will come for you. You have a key now; you can get out quickly . . . I must go back to my cabin."

"God bless your Dutch gall, Hans. And

tell Merrill I got her letter and that I'll use this key and see her tomorrow night late."

"*Ja.* But have a care. *Pas op.* It's death."

"Don't worry," said Gabriel. "Good night."

AFTER the steward left, circumstances were beginning to arrange themselves in Gabriel's mind. First, if the *Apeldoorn* was to be scuttled. it was definitely not with the idea of insurance remuneration. Steuber was working for the Nazi government; and while he disclaimed any official nod in the operations, the strategy of any tactic would certainly be to the advantage of the Reich.

With that as the ultimate idea, only few possibilities were left. Their course did not give weight to one possibility; that they were bound for Germany with the *Apeldoorn's* cargo. The small amount of fuel oil they carried was a drop in the bucket in comparison to the capacity of tankers especially built for transportation of oil. He could not believe that all this risk and neutral involvement could be dared for such a small supply.

The false SOS and the new dressing of the ship as the *Weymouth* of Vancouver was really the first solid clue. It would have been different if Steuber had merely changed the paint job and assumed a fictitious name, as the sailors who had seized the *City of Flint* did, changing the American name to *Alf* and raising a Norwegian flag over her.

There was plainly—unconfirmed, of course—a meticulous duplication in the details of the *Weymouth.* The *Apeldoorn's* appearance had changed very drastically. She looked older, more ill-kempt, and there was an English touch in those straight high stacks. The false gun on the stern, the removal of the aft mast, the false cargo booms forward—all these were details which had meant much work; and therefore, as far as Gabriel was concerned, meant a veracity of duplication.

On that basis, conceding the existence of a real *Weymouth* looking very much like the *Apeldoorn* in her new regalia, why had Steuber chosen her? He was sailing in waters where the British men-of-war plainly ruled the seas. It was not entirely impossible that they might meet up with a warship.

Suppose the real *Weymouth* had already been in contact with a warship in the area? It would mean the doom of the plan.

Steuber was a sharp, intelligent man, and Gabriel had no doubts about his executive ability. There had been, too, a good deal of imagination in the entire thing. Steuber, having gone so far, would never have taken such a long chance. Steuber was the sort who would reduce chance to its least mathematical possibility.

That meant the *SS Weymouth* had but recently ceased to exist, unknown to the outer world, yet known to Steuber. And Steuber had had the *Apeldoorn* assume the *Weymouth's* guise. Did it also mean the *Weymouth* had been sunk while in these waters?

Destination unknown, Steuber had said. Gabriel chewed a pipe. The officer might have told the truth. Perhaps, at that moment, Steuber had had no definite destination; but he had ploughed further into the South Atlantic none the less. Waiting for the destination?

Gabriel felt very cold, and he began to hear a ringing in his ears as the blood rushed into them. He rose slowly to his feet, staring at the porthole where the dark sky began to show vaguely. It was another day. He crossed the room and stared out. There was one answer only, and he didn't like it at all.

CHAPTER XX

SAVE MY NECK

THAT was a brief and hopeless day; and despite the fact of his confinement to the cabin, Gabriel found it passing much too quickly.

He wished vaguely that he had not fathomed the thing; for having done so, he was impressed with the urgency necessary to salvation, and dismayed because he could think of nothing worth trying.

He ate the scanty dinner of cold, salty beef which Van der Decken brought under the cover of Leiper's gun. And then he waited for the hours to pass. He became impatient. At midnight he used the key, unlocked the door and stepped out into *verboden* territory where capture was execution.

Merrill expected him. He had no sooner unlocked the door than she opened it and pulled him inside. He struck a match to see her. She looked colorfully attractive in a gay dirndl. He understood her psychology in donning it; for he had put on the checked sports jacket again if only because it was such a cheerful thing.

Merrill had been sewing on the sofa, in the dark. "Sit down," she said. "Have you missed me?"

"To tell you the truth, yes," he said, somewhat fiercely. "I got used to you pretty quickly."

"That's an ugly compliment and I refuse to accept it," she said. Her eyes searched his face for a moment. "You don't even look civilized, Gabriel. Haven't you slept?" The match went out.

"I slept enough," he said. "I really have missed you. Thanks for sewing the fish up. You did a terrible job, but you didn't ruin him. It was an asinine trick, their searching poor Thomas."

"They searched everything," Merrill said, shivering. "Leiper and the sallow-faced one—Franks. They were desperate men when they came in here. I was terrified. I heard them come in—I thought it was you. Then they opened my door—I hadn't locked it, y'know—and they pointed a gun at me and told me to get out of bed. They searched everything I owned, and took a flashlight and some papers I had, and my passport."

"You poor kid," Gabriel said. "I'm sorry I wasn't here."

"What could you have done? You couldn't have started a gun fight with them. You might have been killed."

"I could have lent a little moral support."

She said, "Anyway, they went through your baggage then and brought out the most amazing collection of junk I've ever had the amazement of seeing. Trunks are for clothes, my boy! The impedimenta they unearthed was something to inspire awe.

"You had some chisels and two funny-looking hammers, and tins of films and a motion picture projector, your camera—they took the camera, of course—and your big flashlight. It was a beauty, too.

"They were disappointed not to find a gun, but they did get a murderous-looking knife—"

"Oh, most of that stuff was geological equipment, and fossil-hunting tools. I usually carry it with me on a trip just in case I get a chance to use it. I'm sorry they took that knife. That was a genuine Finnish *pukkah,* and I paid eighteen dollars for it. The movie stuff is for the Ishi congress in Rio de Janeiro."

"Gabriel, if we could get a bulb, you could signal by flashing from the light switch."

"Yes," he said listlessly. "We've a fat chance of getting a bulb. And less chance of meeting a ship on the port. It could only be done at night with a bulb. My projector could have been used by day, though with its beam—but I suppose you know what happened to it?"

"Yes. But you can still work by day! A mirror. I've a face mirror, around six inches in diameter, with a magnifying side. You could make a heliograph out of that—"

"That's an idea! Take good care of it. Better to leave it here with you. If they found it with me, they'd confiscate it."

He didn't allow himself to get excited again: "We could use it from the portside in the morning and the starboard in the afternoon. The starboard cabins are all locked, but I have a master key."

"Suppose they caught you."

"We'd be licked." He glanced at her soberly. "The moment we attempt to signal another ship in any fashion, there'd be no turning back. Steuber means it. He'd—oh, well. There's no point in scaring you."

"You're not scaring me," she said. "But

at least that's one possibility—that heliograph idea. I'm working on another."

"*You* are? What is it?"

"I'll show you later."

GABRIEL rose to his feet. "I don't want you working on anything, do you understand? I don't want you sticking your lovely neck into any noose. Keep clear of it. If anything happens, they won't touch you. There's no mercy in this, if things go wrong."

"I can help."

"I just want you to keep out of it." His voice was desperate. "Can't you understand? I'd rather see you imprisoned aboard a raider than stung by grenade fragments."

She dropped her hands in her lap. "Raider?"

"Yes," Gabriel said. It was out, what had been in his mind. "That's the design for the destruction of the *Apeldoorn*. It's the only one I can see. That's our destination—a rendezvous with a German sea raider, probably the *Scheer* or the rechristened *Luetzow*. It's the only possible answer."

"Gabriel—how—"

"Steuber has made the *Apeldoorn* a real ship, the *Weymouth*, which means that the *Weymouth* has ceased to exist. It's all theory, but it's the only theory that stands up.

"If one of the Nazi pocket battleships, raiding the south Atlantic, had captured and sunk the *Weymouth*, Steuber would have been so instructed, and that's why he's changed the *Apeldoorn*.

"No one but the raider would know the real *Weymouth* is a memory; and as the *Weymouth*, being in these waters, this ship would be less likely to meet an offshore challenge from patrols."

"But I don't see it—why we should keep a rendezvous with a Nazi battleship."

"Because the raider is low on fuel, Merrill, and this is the only desperate way they've got to refuel. The German tender ships are all held in South American ports, watched like hawks. Only three weeks ago, the tender *Schwelsiz* was seized and sunk.

"The raider must have been desperate for oil, and the Wilhelmstrasse took this way out, by seizing a neutral with oil and taking her to meet the raider. After the oil is pumped into the raider, the *Apeldoorn* can be sunk or scuttled, and all of us can be transferred to the prison hold of the German, which doubtless imprisons good British seamen aplenty.

"I know it's true. It's not fantastic; it's logical. It's the work of desperate men. Everything ties up. Steuber's talk of private enterprise. The Reich couldn't be interested officially in such an act of piracy. The false SOS, changing the identity, all of it!

"The destination may be unknown, but there is a sea raider waiting there for oil to keep her screws turning, perhaps so that she can get back to Kiel."

"They couldn't swing that, Gabriel."

"Yes!" he said. "The rotten part of the whole thing is that they have nine chances out of ten of swinging it. We can't offer any real resistance in the face of their armaments. The odds of our meeting up with a warship are so slim as to be hopeless; and if we did meet up, the odds of our being able to tell them that something is wrong are just about nil.

"This heliograph is good stuff and I could swing a wireless message with your hand mirror as neatly as Thimm works his transmitter contacts up above. But we'd have to flash from the portside in the morning, the starboard in the afternoon; and we can't flash at all at night.

"There would be no telling where any ship might lie, perhaps so far off us as not to be able to see the flashes, for we're too close to the waterline down here."

"Gabriel," Merrill said, "light another match and look here. Would this be any help?"

He struck a match as she spread out her sewing on the floor.

WHEN he got over his first stupefaction, he realized how neatly she had been concealing the thing; for when he had come in it had looked as if she had

been sewing on a satin evening gown—which it had been.

The flag measured four by three feet, its field a rectangle of red satin which she had cut from a gown. In the center of the rectangle, she had sewn a circle of white satin, plainly cut from a slip, and in the circle of white she had fashioned a superb Nazi swastika using the flannel of a black skirt.

The whole thing had been done with rigorous care, the edges of the field even hemmed neatly. She had made one of the two German national flags.

The match went dark.

"I thought of the red, white and black one," she said, "but that could have been mistaken. There'd be no mistaking this one. This was Hitler's flag and Hitler's cross."

"Good Lord!" Gabriel gasped. He stooped, felt, hastily scooped it up and bunched it. "Anyone can walk in! It's like holding nitro; if they saw it—" He paused.

"Anyone else know?"

"Van der Decken. I told him. He said he would try and run it up on the masthead when the time came."

"That's no good. He'd get himself killed. We've got to save it for a passing ship, any ship. It might work. We could rope it from the two portholes, weight the bottom sash of it and spread it out on the ship's side between the windows. You had plenty of courage to pull that."

"Oh, certainly," Merrill said. "My lineage goes back to Betsy Ross."

Gabriel didn't smile. "You're scared."

She rose to her feet and found him in the dark. "Gabriel, I am frightened. I've been frightened ever since they walked in and pointed that gun in my face . . ."

He put his arms around her and held her tightly. Her hair pressed against his chin. "Why don't you cry?"

"I told you," she replied. "I've never been able to cry in a crisis. I've never been ladylike that way. I'm not womanly."

He tipped up her chin, "Holding you like this seems the most natural thing in the world."

"Because you're used to me?"

"No," he said. "Because I'm in love with you." He kissed her firmly and she returned the embrace without restraint. "Van der Decken told me you were in love with me, Merrill. Letti Gaynor said I was in love with you. I told them they were both wrong, but it seems I am. It seems as if I were the one who found out last."

"Oh, Gabriel, you were such an old stick, with that awful fish of yours and your righteous airs."

"I'm sorry," he said humbly. "I never even thought—"

She interrupted him with a kiss and dropped her head on his chest. "I think you're very dear."

"Then Hans was right."

"Yes." She looked up at him. "He was right. I love you, darling. I love you so much, I think I could even learn to love that prehistoric pickerel you call Thomas." She smiled warmly. "When we're together like this, now, it isn't possible that anything could touch us or spoil it . . . But what's going to happen to us, Gabriel?"

Gabriel shrugged. "That depends. But we'll have to do something. We can't just sit and wait. The next ship we sight might be the raider. That will be the worst of sighting horizon smoke from now on. We won't know whether it's a break or our destination. . . . If I had a gun!"

"What could you do, even with a gun?"

"Take them, one by one. Carefully. And the first one I'd take would be Thimm, for if I could get my hands on that transmitter, I'd get word out somehow."

"Kill Thimm you mean?" Her voice was strained.

"Not unless he was a fool."

"I'm glad you haven't a gun then. It would be dangerous."

"Nothing ventured—you know that one. I've got more to lose now. I'll take the flag."

"Why?"

"Don't ask questions. I don't want it in this cabin. I'll hide it somewhere."

"They'd recognize the materials."

"Some one could have stolen your stuff.

I'll be back tomorrow. Sit tight and don't try any more tricks. Promise me."

She nodded. "Yes. I promise. But I'll clean that hand mirror as it's never been cleaned before."

"Good." He kissed her and left.

HE MADE his cabin safely. But he was worried. It was true that some one else could have stolen her materials for a flag; but who else could have sewn them that expertly?

It was a valuable asset, that flag; but at the same time it was a death warrant for Merrill. He half thought of destroying it. There were other ways and means.

But in the end, he could not. One glimpse of it by a British ship and Steuber would be sitting down to write a suicide note. Gabriel shuddered. Steuber had a large stake in the operations. For if anything went awry, it would be the only graceful way to absolve the German Admiralty from involvement.

Captain Klinkert had once told him of a jewel thief aboard the *Apeldoorn* who had hidden his loot cleverly when his cabin was searched in reply to a shore request. The fellow had taped a quantity of diamonds outside his porthole against the ship's hull, using ordinary adhesive tape.

The idea of hanging the flag out his own port was not so good, however, for it could be spotted easily from the wing tip of the bridge. Steuber undoubtedly had some one watching the hull now and then for trickery, for the very obvious trick was for some one to go over during the night, somehow, and paint a swastika on the ship's side.

Gabriel finally cleared the broken projection bulb from its base in the movie projector, wrapped the flag carefully and forced it down in the cavity, replacing the aerating cap on top and putting the projector back in its case.

He was still fumbling with the projector, in the darkness, when a hand rattled his doorknob noisily. Gabriel crouched in frozen dismay; for surely it was Leiper, come back, having spied on him somehow.

The unlikeliness of this instantly reassured him, however. He shoved the projector as deep in the trunk as possible and leaped to his feet, his back against the trunk. Again the knob clicked, frantically.

Gabriel snapped, "Who is it?"

"It's I," said Letti Gaynor, her voice trembling, "Let me in."

"What are you doing here?"

"Gabriel, don't be a fool! I'm not sure —I thought I was followed. That Leiper chap with the gun—let me in! I know you have a key!"

"But you're his friend," Gabriel said mockingly. "He wouldn't harm a hair of your unscrupulous head, my dear."

There was a long silence. He could hear her by the door, panting heavily. He felt in his pocket for the key and opened the door. "How did you know?"

"Because I saw you come back!" she whispered sharply. "I've been waiting for you—wasting time—with Leiper down here somewhere! If he finds me here, he'll kill me. For the love of heaven—"

Gabriel struck a match and went over to the door and took her by the arm.

"All right," Letti said. "I'm all right! Listen—" He could feel her shaking. Her forearm was studded with goose pimples.

"THAT is a very charming outfit you're wearing," Gabriel remarked blandly as the match faded. "I like them bright and cheery. You'll be wearing them that way from now on, but even so I don't think they'll lift your spirits too much or brighten your days aboard a German raider. They'll have to be colossally cheerful to compensate for Lord knows how long you'll stay at sea, unable to put ashore at a neutral port, having to run the British blockade to get back to Bremerhaven where you don't want to go anyhow—"

The muscles of her arm went taut. "How did you know that? Who told you that?"

"Did I have to be told? Give me credit for just one microscopic nodule of intelligence, Letti. Does that explain your spectacular and somewhat sinister entry? Were you going to make a great revelation? It's too late for that."

"Gabriel, don't. This isn't the time for that! We've got to be friends! Why do you think I took the risk of coming here?"

"To save your neck," he said bluntly. He smiled slowly. "But I can't save your neck, my dear. I can't save my own, and mine would come ahead of yours. You don't seem to share Steuber's enthusiasm for the Cause. I couldn't picture the beauteous Letti, pale and fragile, working her little fingers to the bone for the Cause."

She cried sharply, "You don't have to be polite to me at this point! You're right about the raider. I don't know which one it is myself, but she's trapped down here with precious little fuel. She hasn't enough to get home, and she hasn't enough to continue raiding.

"The plums have all been poor ones. They had to seize a neutral. It's the oil, Gabriel, the fuel oil. Enough to take her home."

"No *magg,*" Gabriel said, feeling her fright in the darkness. "You're beginning to break up, aren't you? You've had dreams. You wouldn't like to be aboard a man-of-war which might see worse action than the *Spee* saw. Your fidelity is touching."

"Damn my fidelity!" Letti said. "I didn't come here to fight with you, you fool! I came to save my own neck! *We've sighted a British warship!* She's off the bow, southward, coming this way. She's seen us. Can you understand me? She's seen us—"

Gabriel sprang at her and clapped his hand over her mouth. "Keep your voice down," he said with ferocity. "You're screaming!"

CHAPTER XXI

STAND BY FOR CHAOS

HE WAS stunned. He could feel her quivering in his grasp and he didn't dare let her go.

A warship. A British battlewagon. He knew she was telling the truth, for her voice was ugly with terror, and she had switched her pledge of allegiance with startling haste.

He said, "How the devil could we stumble across a Britisher? It's beyond belief, that kind of luck!"

"It's not luck," Letti gasped. "The Leeds girl—"

"What about her?"

Her father wasn't fooled by Thimm's false distress call. There's been a general call on the air for two days for all ships to keep out an eye for the *Apeldoorn.* They even calculated her possible positions and broadcast them. Leeds wasn't as much of a fool as Steuber and Thimm thought."

"Be quiet," Gabriel said, panicked with excitement. "I've got to think."

"But Steuber may fool the warship at that!" she ranted, unable to stem the surge of words. "That's why I came to you! This ship is completely disguised as the *Weymouth,* and the *Weymouth* was real. She was captured and sunk about fifty miles south of here only four days ago by the Nazi raider. That's how Steuber took her guise; he was told to—"

Gabriel snatched her handbag from her. "With all your sudden affinity for freedom, I'm sure you wouldn't mind my taking your gun."

"I haven't any gun," she said shrilly.

He took the revolver from her bag. "You're consistent to the end, anyhow," he growled. "But I happened to see this way back in the Botanic Gardens in Port of Spain. Remember, my dear?

"All right, I'll save your neck, if I get a chance. The way you've been making a racket—come on, I've got to get Hans and Merrill. Have you got a flashlight?"

"No."

"I've got to get a flashlight to signal that warship."

Outside in the corridor, a floor-board creaked noisily. Then there was dead silence again. Letti gasped at him and threw her hand to her mouth. She sounded as if she would scream.

Gabriel took a long breath and braced himself for the sound of it, managing to grasp, "Hang on, keep still."

"Lock it!"

"I can't. Leiper has a key too. He could

unlock it from the outside. It's probably Van der Decken."

But he wasn't so sure. Someone had approached the door silently enough, except for that treacherous floor-board. Van der Decken would not have approached that way. You would have heard his heavy footsteps the entire length of the corridor. The steward had no cause for sneaking on the door.

"Hans?" Gabriel called softly.

The door jarred open suddenly. Not Hans. The tall tense form of Mr. Leiper stood there, his brass buttons glistening in the reflection of his own flashlight which he shot into the room upon them.

Gabriel caught the glint of the pistol in the man's hand; it was like the flicker of a shark's belly two fathoms down.

Leiper said nothing, not a word. There was nothing to be said, not even a sentence of death: for Steuber had already pronounced that in the dining room that first morning after the seizure.

This was Omega. Gabriel felt it as distinctly as Leiper exuded it. Even Letti must have sensed the finality of the figure in the doorway, for she cracked completely and began to scream.

She screamed her innocence, she told of Gabriel's guilt. She said Gabriel had tricked her—and that was all she could get out for Leiper shot her, almost as if to stop the terrible shrillness of her voice.

There was something infinitely slow in the way he did it and yet it happened in seconds. The gun was not as loud as Gabriel would have thought. Indeed, the small revolver in his own hand cracked with more penetration, perhaps because it was closer to him.

There was absolutely no premeditated thought in his reprisal. He aimed and fired from pure imitation. The cabin was filled with the smell of smoke, and the sound of Leiper's heavy fall. The silence then began to roar.

GABRIEL was trembling. He found he could not control his legs. The room was in complete darkness now, for Leiper's flashlight had gone out when it struck the floor.

The darkness was thick. It could have been black smoke. It still smelled of gunpowder.

He stood there, without moving, waiting for some reaction. Nothing happened, momentarily, until he heard the sound of his own name, Merrill calling it. She sounded a million miles away.

He shuddered and lighted a match. Leiper was lying face down on the floor. He looked as if he might have fallen and then petrified. The pistol was beyond his right hand where it had dropped. The flashlight lens and bulb were broken.

Gabriel picked up the pistol as the match burned his fingers. He made no attempt to turn Leiper over: the man was obviously dead.

Another match showed him Letti, crumpled pathetically, in a heap by the door. She looked broken.

He did not wait for the match to burn his fingers this time. He blew it out, hurriedly. He had stopped trembling but he was seized with a repugnance which dazed him, rooting him there.

"Flag," he thought, "got to get the flag!" Surely the uproar had been heard topside. Admittedly, this was C deck, but the ship had been so still . . .

He dove into the trunk and dragged forth the projector. His fingers probed it for the bulb case cap, but the parts of the projector felt alike in the dark. In the corridor, there were the thunder of running feet.

That tears it, he thought in dismay; they got here fast.

But this time it was Hans Van der Decken, and he was calling hoarsely, "Gabriel! *Haast u wat! Waar gaat gij?*"

"Hans!" he called.

Van der Decken was in the doorway. Gabriel could hear him panting, but could not see him. "Come on, *mijnheer,* make tracks from here! *Lieve hemel* the screaming, the shots, everything! They are coming below; I heard them running on the deck—"

"The flag!" C briel said. "I can't get the flag!"

"Never mind the flag, for heaven's sake! They're coming with guns! We must run for it!"

"The flag—"

"Let it go!"

Gabriel rose from the projector and grabbed the crate with *Isopholis Orthotomous* inside. He knew exactly where he had left it on the table.

They fled into the dark corridor, leaving the precious flag behind them. Hans Van der Decken shoved Gabriel along. Gabriel felt heartsick leaving that flag behind, but the steward was right. Lights were flashing on the deck above through the aperture of the grand staircase and men were running.

When they reached Merrill's door Gabriel stopped and Van der Decken ran into him in the dark and grunted. "Not in there, *mijnheer!*"

"Have to—we can't go anywhere here. They've covered the aft companionways!"

"But if you go in here, the girl will be in it!"

"I know. Can't help it. She's in it now. They'll find the flag. The door is locked. Break it with me."

They plunged against it, without acknowledging Merrill's call to them. The door stood the blow well, but the catch pulled out bodily amidst screws and splinters. They stepped in; the cabin was black as pitch. "Merrill!" Gabriel said.

SHE found him in the dark and clung to him. He dropped the ganoid on the floor and gripped her. His hand swept her face. He kissed her.

"I thought you'd gone," she said. Her voice was steady. "Those ghastly sounds and the shots—oh, darling!"

Van der Decken had slammed the door. "Bad, *mijnheer*. No lock. They'll break right in. Move the furniture here, we'll block the door. Juf-vrouw Leeds, into the bedroom and wait, *als 't u belieft!*"

"Take Thomas," Gabriel said. He found the crate and thrust it at her. "Mustn't desert poor Thomas on a night like this."

"Be careful, darling."

"We're beyond that, Merrill. This is a blind alley. You've got to know it. Hans—here's a gun. Got it from Leiper."

"Did you get his grenades? In the pouch?"

"Oh, Lord, never thought of them! We could have used them!"

They shoved furniture against the door, grateful that the door opened inwards. A bureau and a chest of drawers went first. Then the sofa and a small desk, the chairs, the table. They kept shoving every stick they could lay hands on in the dark. The barricade felt formidable.

They paused, breathing heavily. Down the corridor, there were muffled voices, heavy with oaths. Under the sill, they caught a faint flash of light.

"*Wel,*" Van der Decken sighed. "They have found him. And they have found that *vlag* too. Too bad, *mijnheer.*"

"Too late for it to have done any good," Gabriel said. "Let's go. We can lock the bedroom door if we have to. And from there, we can get into the bathroom and lock again. They're good doors."

"Against grenades?" said Van der Decken. He was grimly gloomy. "*Dat beteekent niets,* but we do the best we can, *mijnheer.*"

"We've a chance. There's only Steuber, Franks, Thimm and Stuttger now. They've still got to take us."

"*Ja,* a chance. We see."

They went into the bedroom. Gabriel thrust Merrill away from a position behind the door where she might be imperiled by shots through the wood. "Stay close to the bathroom," he said. "That's the next stop."

"They're in the hall," Van der Decken said, listening sharply.

That was plain, for the flashlights were concentrating their beams upon the catch. That it was broken would instantly be recognized. A fist pounded on the door, and a sharp voice called, "Adams!"

"Don't answer," Merrill whispered, gripping Gabriel's arm. "The less they know the better. Please don't answer."

"*Ja,* quiet," said Van der Decken.

GABRIEL gripped the revolver and wished it were something more formidable. He had a hard time getting his wind and his heart was pounding in his ears. He realized that he was afraid.

"Adams! Do you hear me?"

"That's Thimm," Gabriel said. "What's he doing down here? It means the radio shack is wide open. If we could only—"

"Adams, we know you're in there," Thimm said, his voice cracking. "Come out and we won't touch the girl. You can't get away was this. Acknowledge me."

Gabriel ignored Thimm's commands.

"Adams!" Thimm shouted. "I give you five seconds!"

"Shouldn't I tell him to go jump in the lake!" Gabriel said.

Van der Decken chuckled. "Say nothing, *mijnheer*. The less he is sure of, the more cautious he will be."

"I know," Gabriel said wryly. "But bravado is all that's left, and it would make me feel very heroic. I need something to make me feel heroic. Light me a cigarette, Merrill? They can't see the match."

Merrill lighted a cigarette for him and passed it to him, then held his arm. "There really isn't much hope, is there?"

"Not much," Gabriel said. "But we'll take a couple with us. They're not all here. Steuber wouldn't leave the bridge, so he sent Thimm down with one of the others, Franks or Stuttger. German boys aren't much on initiative. They like to have a commander. . . . Five seconds are up by now. What gives out?"

His reply was a roaring explosion, the concussion of which jarred them. Van der Decken had slammed the door a moment before, suspicious, and stepped aside.

There was a second explosion, much closer, ear-splitting. The din was awesome and grenade fragments plucked long splinters off the back of the bedroom door.

"Open up," Gabriel snapped. "They're in."

Van der Decken opened the door a notch and instantly fired out into the darkness three times. He slammed the door and locked it. "Bathroom," he said.

They pushed the bedroom furniture against the bedroom door and retreated into the bathroom, leaving this door ajar.

"Did you hit anybody?"

"Neen," said Van der Decken. "All dark. Couldn't see a *muis*. But they blew the door all down with the first, and tossed a second in to take care of anybody in the room. I just fired to show them that it wasn't healthy to come in yet. There'll be more grenades."

HIS last sentence was confirmed. It was drowned out in a third explosion which blew in the bedroom door in a smashing symphony of wreckage.

The sub-machine gun began to speak then, clattering crazily as it swept the outer room. Bullets hit against the wall.

The gun stopped, and the silence was profound. Gabriel restrained a sneeze; the dust and smoke were all around there. The silence persisted.

Gabriel said, "They're still afraid to come in."

"Ja."

Merrill pulled at Gabriel, and he turned.

"What is it?"

"Listen, darling, listen!"

There were no more grenades or shots, and the silence endured. Under them another silence made itself felt. That hum of the propeller shaft deep in the *Apeldoorn's* bowels had broken its course. The mute tremble of the engines and the screws' vibration had vanished; even the walls and floor were struck dumb. There was no more life in the ship.

"Engines stopped," Gabriel said, harshly. "We've heaved to!"

Outside, there were voices, exchanging news in an explosive German. Van der Decken listened, then roared with elation, "A warship!"

Merrill groaned. "The raider!"

"Neen, neen, not the raider!" Van der Decken exclaimed. "I heard them. *Engelsch oorlogsschip!"*

Merrill asked, "What's that?

"British man-of-war," Gabriel said. He felt frustrated. He told Van der Decken

to lock the bathroom door, and then he ran to the bathroom porthole, opened it and thrust his head out.

A chill struck him as he saw her. She was south of them, off the port bow, coming due northward, only her riding lights visible. But there was a sheen on the sea which showed her form vaguely: a heavy cruiser, with a bone in her teeth.

He pulled his head in and said, "This is going to be hard to take."

"But they've stopped us!" Merrill cried. "They'll come aboard!"

CHAPTER XXII

VERY FAITHFUL FISH

GABRIEL turned back. The cruiser slowed and then halted some three thousand yards off the port beam. Up on her bridge, a heliograph went into action. *Identify yourself by wireless,* the blinker ordered, and then blacked out.

The long blinding finger of a searchlight swept across the water, spotted itself somewhere high above them—doubtless on the bridge—and stayed there.

There was a pause in which nothing happened at all. Then the blinker went to work again. *Have you been in contact with* SS Apeldoorn, *freighter six thousand tons, or any ship avoiding close examination by you? If so give position where last sighted.*

Gabriel choked. "They're asking *this* ship for information on the *Apeldoorn!*" he said savagely. "What rotten luck! Your father made up for that radiogram, Merrill. He's send them out looking for us. And right here they'll pass us by because I can't communicate. Steuber will feed them a false clue and send them on their way."

Merrill said, "The hand mirror, darling! I've got it right here in the bathroom. You can signal with it—"

"In the dark?" Van der Decken growled.

"In the dark!" Gabriel said, his eyes on the cruiser's searchlight. "Yes! Have you got a nail file or a scissor here?"

"Nail scissor," Merrill said.

"Let's have it. Where's Thomas?" He seized the scissor and felt out the stitching around the *Isopholis'* stomach and cut the strands and then dug his fist in and brought out the wool stuffing.

"Lord bless you, Thomas, I'll give you plaster insides when we get home if we ever do! Light a match, Merrill, light a match and set this stuff ablaze, and then get me a piece of cardboard—never mind. I've got an old envelope right here. Light the wool!"

The match flared and the wool burst afire at once. Gabriel thrust the blaze out the porthole and waved it back and forth. It burned quickly and he began to feel the bite of the flames; but they saw it, across the water there, for the pencil of white light left the bridge and went swooping down along the hull until it framed the small blaze square in its center.

Gabriel instantly dropped the wool and raised the mirror to the porthole. Merrill shielded his eyes from the core of the searchlight and he focused the mirror upon the bridge of the cruiser and then went to work with the envelope, breaking the reflection of the searchlight upon the mirror's face by passing the envelope jerkily between the mirror and the light.

He did not waste time with a full explanation, signaling at once, S O S— S O S; for he did not know how long the light would stay there.

It stayed. He continued instantly, *Disregard all other signals.* Apeldoorn *seized by Nazis. Disguised as* Weymouth. *S O S . . . require immediate assistance . . . crew imprisoned . . . passengers under siege. . . . Rendezvous . . .*"

The searchlight went out, and the night left him blinking. "Did they get it?" Merrill whispered, her throat tight.

"Wait," Gabriel said. "Wait." He watched the blinker on the cruiser's bridge. It was dark. He watched it and waited for a *BKV:* "Every assistance will be rendered." None showed. The blinker stayed dark.

"Fire the guns," Van der Decken said desperately. "Maybe they would hear them!"

"No." Gabriel swallowed hard. "Too far

away. No good."

The *Apeldoorn* began to tremble again. There were the engines first. The screw would take up its rhythmic beat in a moment. Van der Decken groaned and stolidly turned to guard the door again.

WITHOUT warning, out on the sea, there was a detonation. Gabriel leaped to the port hole and thrust his head out. South of the bow, a shell burst and the phosphoresence of water rose like a geyser in the night.

The heliograph sprang to life again. Gabriel relayed the message to them as he read it, in the flashes.

Do not attempt use your radio or you will be shelled. Prepare for boarding party. Any attempt at resistance—"

That was enough. Gabriel jerked his head inside, cracking it soundly against the top perimeter of the porthole. He fell against Merrill, shouting unintelligible words, then he stopped shouting and held her close to him. He was panting; he could not speak.

He waited until he had caught his breath and then he said with all the dignity he could summon, "All we have to do is sit down and wait. Just sit and wait."

Van der Decken was laughing in a low growling way. He groped across the room and found the ganoid in its crate and he picked them up. *"Ja,"* he said. "I take care of him, *mijnheer*. This Thomas gave everything he had, did he not?"

"God bless Thomas," Gabriel said cheerfully. "A very faithful fish."

He perched on the rim of the bathtub beside Merrill and pulled her head against him and held it there tightly. His hand found her face wet with tears. "You're crying!" he said.

"Yes, yes," she said ecstatically. "I know it's silly—but—"

"But it's womanly," Gabriel said with a smile the darkness hid. "It's very womanly. Your father should be here to see you."

THE END

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